THE METAMORPHIC IMAGINATION: THE ART OF TRANSFORMATION AND ENCHANTMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND NORTH AFRICA

(c. 300 BCE – 300 CE)

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DOCTOR PHILOSOPHY

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the art and imagination of metamorphosis in the Mediterranean and North Africa (c. 300 BCE – 300 CE). My approach explores the perceptual culture of change—the imaginative and sensory encounters of images of mythical change—while focusing on the imagination's disenchantment or enchantment. The study tells a new story about the metamorphic image; not just how static images might represent changing forms (into plants, animals, new genders, etc.) in a rationally ordered way, but how images depicted paradoxical and wonderous relationships between body and soul. It shows how images enticed viewers to imagine visible skins yet hidden souls, bodily materiality yet spiritual incorporeality, and unchanging identity amid a world of changing forms.

More broadly, this study demonstrates how the metamorphic image became entangled in ancient debates about the enchantment or disenchantment of the gods, bodies, and the natural world. On the one hand, rationalist philosophers and historians often clashed with mythical tradition, pitting changes in the natural world against supernatural change. Engaging with rationalist discourses about sensory experience, motion, and myth reveals a new approach to rationalist polemics of the metamorphic image. Disenchantment occurred not simply through the creation of new artistic scenes or iconoclastic pursuits but as a perceptual stratagem, which employed optical tricks (anamorphosis, distant versus close looking, etc.) to debunk the strange or miraculous. On the other hand, I show how many images of metamorphosis enticed viewers into a state of enchantment, that is, a kind of revery in magical, metaphysical, or irrational possibilities. We witness material qualities that envision embodiment and flux; shifting

conditions of light and shadow that elicit spirits or phantoms; and how formal prototypes and drunkenness might conjure hallucinatory illusions of metamorphosis. The narrative also shows how enchantment spread abroad. Roman subjects fell under the spell of Egyptomania and masqueraded as embodied icons of mythical change. Meanwhile, travelers imagined freakish petrified faces amid windswept rocky landscapes. Examining the perceptual culture of metamorphic imagery ultimately reveals its fraught position amid contests over rationality and enchantment, bodily change and soulful presence, natural change and supernatural wonders.

This narrative unfolds in four chapters. Chapter one explores two different types of metamorphic imagery. First, I examine how an image's materiality could envision the soul's ascension during its apotheosis. Second, I explore how artworks could prompt viewers to imagine souls hidden within animal forms through an image's physiognomic qualities. Chapter two probes the relationship between rationalism and the metamorphic imagination, showing how some metamorphic images allowed for the disenchantment of the miraculous. Chapter three investigates metamorphic imagery represented primarily in the spectator's imagination. During symposia, Bacchic imagery prompted viewers to imagine hallucinatory delusions of animality and transformation. In the wilderness, travelers encountered pareidolia: they imagined faces and forms in the landscape's chance imagery and debated whether these were the relics of petrifications or other miraculous changes. Lastly, chapter four takes its inspiration from Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* by exploring the mysterious qualities of masquerades and their relationship to metamorphic change in Greco-Roman Egypt.

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Traversing the road to this dissertation (during a pandemic) was filled with twists and turns, as well as academic and emotional ups and downs: joys and sorrows, blockades and breakthroughs, ennui and bursts of intellectual thrill. However, having a world-class dissertation committee ensured that the highs outweighed the lows. Close intellectual engagement with these individuals allowed me to think freely, substantively improved my work, and I grew as a person as a result of their humanity. In particular, it was an honor to work with my co-advisors, Fabio Barry and Alex Nemerov. Both scholars are exceptional teachers. Courses like Fabio Barry's seminar on the materiality of images and Alex Nemerov's seminar on the spectral possibilities of art were seminal influences in the early stages of my research. During dissertation writing, the former scholar opened my mind to many new possibilities and encouraged me to think broadly, exploring the metamorphic image as a transcultural phenomenon. He was generous with his time and helped challenge me not to take any intellectual assumptions for granted. What's more — with all obstacles that the COVID-19 pandemic created for everyone — his insights about writing (and good humor!) cheered my mind and energized me with momentum during the dissertation's various challenges. I also thank Alex Nemerov for his mentorship. Throughout my Ph.D., he has encouraged me to look more closely at images, describe them evocatively, and discover my own voice as a writer. He has also cultivated my curiosity to probe the most inscrutable aspects of metamorphic representation, including the image's paradoxical, soulful, and irrational possibilities.

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Figure 4.13. Detail of 4.11.

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INTRODUCTION

Around the first century BCE, someone likely scaled a mountain and quarried a fragment of rock crystal just less than the size of one's fist **[Figure 0.1]**.[1] In the process of time, the artist who took it in hand was able to give this crystal body a recognizable form, that of the nude Aphrodite caught in a moment of her bath, a moment which can still be recognized even in the statue's damaged state. Aphrodite's own name was evocative of her liquid metamorphosis from *aphros* (ἀφρός), or the "foam" of the sea.[2] In the Greco-Roman imagination, it was believed that rock crystal was water that had become a super-frozen solid, to the degree that it could not even be melted. In Greek antiquity the term *krystallos* (κρύσταλλος) meant both "ice" and "rock-crystal."[3] Pliny, likewise, called this material both "crystal" (*crystallinus*) as well as "ice" (*glacies*), which he mentions had been cut from the cold mountain slopes from "rocks that almost reach the heavens."[4] Even today, mineralogists use the Greek term *enhydros* (ἔνυδρος;

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, classical references are cited from the Loeb Classical Library. Greek and Latin vocabulary are cited from Robert Scott et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary*, rev., enl., and in great part rewritten ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002). For Pliny's description of how rock crystal was quarried from mountains, see: Pliny, *Natural History*, 36.1

[2] The wordplay with "*aphros*" and the argument that rock crystal "signifies her [Aphrodite's] liquid origins" are both found in Patrick R. Crowley, "Crystalline Aesthetics and the Classical Concept of the Medium," *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture.* 23 (2016): 220-251, esp. 237-238. For other arguments about the liquidity of gems see: Erkinger Schwarzenberg, "Cristallo," 2004, in *Vitrum: Vetro fra arte e scienza nel mondo romano*, ed. Marco Beretta and Giovanni Di Pasquale (Florence: Giunti, 2004), 61-70.
Fabio Barry, *Painting in Stone: Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 137-138; Patrick R. Crowley, "Rock Crystal and the Nature of Artifice in Ancient Rome," 2020, in *Seeking Transparency Rock Crystals Across the Medieval Mediterranean*, ed. Cynthia Hahn and Avinoam Shalem (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2020), 151-162.

[3] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "κρύσταλλος." See also Crowley, "Rock Crystal," 151.

[4] *Natural History*, 36.1-3.

etym. “water-inside”) to describe otherwise solid stones that have trapped within them a sloshing-mixture of water (or oil) and air bubbles that seemingly reveal their liquid origins **[Figure 0.4]**.

When ancient subjects took the crystal Aphrodite in their hands, the possibility of metamorphosis passed before their eyes. While looking through the natural glass, Aphrodite's body took on fleshy hues, as if frozen water held forth the possibility of "becoming" living flesh **[Figure 0.2]**. To change the color of a sculpted body was, in effect, to change its very "flesh"; as Patrick Crowley has perceptively observed, Greeks not only imagined the word *chrōs* (χρώς) to signify "color," but also "skin" or "the color of the skin" more precisely.[5] The optical effect of handling the Aphrodite may also parallel the Pygmalion myth. When the sculptor brought his "snowy" statue to life the moment his body—"inflamed" with desire—touched the statue of the woman; so too did the love goddess's magic seem to bring her statuette to life when it was caressed by human hands **[Figure 0.2-3]**.[6] Indeed, it was precisely Aphrodite who answered Pygmalion's prayer amid his vacillating perceptions of materiality (between flesh and ivory). Ancient minds likely wondered at the possibilities of transformation: in some primordial moment, water became crystallized ice, the crystal was formed into a shapely body, and that body—in the ephemeral and charming moments of its handling—took on the appearance of a goddess of flesh and blood.

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[5] Crowley, "Crystalline Aesthetics,” 239.

[6] For the Pygmalion myth: *Metamorphoses*, 10.243–299.

This statuette may seem estranged from the rationalisms of modernity and antiquity. It is not just an image that illustrates certain features from myth, nor does it draw upon the iconography of Aphrodite's shell to communicate her transformation. And while the statuette does, in fact, procure insights about the natural world from natural philosophy, it avoids the philosopher's rationalizing impulses by seducing viewers to take delight in the fantasies of metamorphic change. I argue that this statuette—as with many other objects in this dissertation—enticed viewers into a state of enchantment, which is at its core a kind of reverie in magical, supernatural, and metaphysical possibilities. (For a more detailed definition, see below: "Methodology: Perceiving Enchantment.")

In what follows, I will first discuss the state of the field, my argument and approach, as well as the contents of the dissertation. Next, although this study is not focused primarily on iconography, I provide a brief survey of the basics of metamorphic representation for readers who would like a primer on the basic ways static images envisioned transformation in antiquity. Afterward, I discuss my methodological approach to the perceptual culture of metamorphosis and its enchantment in more detail. Lastly, I provide some historical context for the term "soul" in Greco-Roman and Egyptian culture and describe how I employ this term throughout the dissertation.

Argument and State of the Field

Despite the sizable corpus of studies of metamorphosis in Classical literature as well as "the body" more generally, the question of how Greco-Roman artists represented

mythical bodily transformations has seldom been the focus of sustained inquiry.[7] Indeed, to the best of my knowledge, the only book to explore the topic at length is Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux's study of the metamorphic image, *L'Homme-cerf et la femme-araignée: Figures grecques de la metamorphose* (2003). The latter study surveys the iconography and textual evolutions of various myths ranging from Circe's magic to Zeus's amorous pursuits, Actaeon, Niobe, Arachne, and various water deities.[8] Yet this does not indicate a lack of scholarly interest in metamorphic representation. On the contrary, many essays and articles have examined the metamorphic image from several perspectives and debated how it should best be studied. Depictions of transformation, for instance, have been instrumentalized as essentially unmediated documentary evidence for the widespread circulation of Ovid's poem *The Metamorphoses*, while the content of metamorphic imagery has been compared to textual sources to identify the historical evolutions of myths. [9] Semeiotic research has compared the representational devices for

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[7] For instance, in one of the most recent assessments of Ovid's influence and the longue durée of metamorphic changes in Western thought, the editors Andrew Gildenhard and Ingo Zissos sum up Ovid's impact quite well: "Ovid's *Metamorphoses* dominates the tradition, peerless in its influence," though if there were a "runner-up" this would be Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*. See "Introduction to Part I," *Transformative Change in Western Thought* (Maney Publishing, 2016), 36. The argument is well established in other scholarly works as well. Ovid's afterlife has left an imprint on ancient, medieval, Early Modern literature and art, and even modern cinema. See all 31 chapters that are devoted to these various influences in John F. Miller and Elizabeth Newlands Carole eds., *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid* (Chichester (UK): Wiley Blackwell, 2014). Or see chapters 15 through 20 in Philip R. Hardie, *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); chapters 7-31. For the body, see the following volumes, plus relevant bibliography: James I. Porter, Constructions of the Classical Body (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Nigel Jonathan Spivey and Michael Squire, Panorama of the Classical World (London: Thames & Hudson, 2008), 8-75; Thorsten Fögen and Mireille M. Lee eds., *Bodies and Boundaries in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (De Gruyter, Berlin, 2009).

[8] Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *L'homme-cerf et la femme-araignée: figures grecques de la métamorphose* (Paris: Gallimard, 2003). She examines ancient Greek visual representations of metamorphosis, with a particular emphasis on vase paintings, and excels in her descriptions of images.

[9] For the documentary approach, see Peter E. Knox, "Ovidian Myths on Pompeian Walls," in *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, eds. John F. Miller and Carole Elizabeth Newlands (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell; 2014), 36-54; For textual and iconographic evolutions, see Frontisi-Ducroux, for instance, in the amorous escapades of Zeus: Frontisi-Ducroux, *L'homme-cerf et la femme-araignée*, 144-178; P. M. C Forbes Irving,

depicting bodily plasticity in the visual and literary arts. In the latter approach, images have been characterized like visual texts, even as metaphor and metamorphosis are treated as synonymous principles (both in involve transformation and continuity).[10] As it relates to temporality, it has been argued that images and texts diverge, as poetry's diachronic representations of transformation are generally contrasted with the synchronic representational modes of visual art. Iconographic perspectives also motivate much of the research, as scholars have isolated pictorial typologies to help us better understand the foundational question of how static images might depict bodily transformation. [11]

While the dominant rationalism provides a valuable foundation for understanding visual metamorphosis, such approaches did not answer many of the questions I was interested in exploring. First, how could metamorphic images disenchant or enchant a viewer's perceptions of myth ? Exploring this inquiry is crucial if we are to comprehend better the relationship between mythical representation and rationalism in the ancient world. Second, how did images of transformation represent body-spirit relationships? Put

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Metamorphosis in Greek Myths (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 197-319. The latter study includes images within a textually-focused study.

[10] Alison Sharrock, "Representing Metamorphosis," in *Art and Text in Roman Culture*, ed. Jas Elsner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 103-130, esp. 107.

[11] Issues of temporality, pictorial typologies, and the relationship between metamorphosis and hybridity are often discussed together. See Sharrock, "Representing Metamorphosis," 103-130, esp. 103-105, 107-111, 124-130; Ducroux, Frontisi-Ducroux, *L'homme-cerf et la femme-araignée,* 161-163, 171, 206; Richard Buxton, Forms of Astonishment: Greek Myths of Metamorphosis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 76-109, esp. 83, 92. Through ten chapters, Buxton concentrates primarily on literary representations, while chapter three provides an informative description of visual representations of metamorphosis, including a summary of the three-fold visual typology. Like Buxton and Frontisi-Ducroux, Alexandridis takes an iconographic approach to animals in ancient Greek myth (metamorphosis, hybridity, and monstrosity), focusing primarily on vase painting: Annetta Alexandridis, "Shifting Species. Animal and Human Bodies in Attic Vase Painting of the 6th and 5th Centuries BC," eds. Fögen M. Thorsten., Lee Mireille, *Bodies and Boundaries in Graeco-Roman Antiquity* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 261-281; "Zwischen Mensch und Tier: Bilder der Metamorphose und der Zoophilie imgriechischen Mythos," in: Luca Tori – Aline Steinbrecher (eds.), Animali. Tiere und Fabelwesen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit. Schweizerisches Nationalmuseum (Geneva Milan: Skira 2013) 70-79.

differently, how might art entice viewers to imagine the paradoxes when a spirit's body undergoes a transformation: visible skins yet hidden souls, bodily materiality yet spiritual incorporeality, and unchanging identity amid a world of changing forms? And how might the material image depict metamorphic myths in which the soul remains after the body's dissolution? (e.g., Echo, apotheosis). Discovering some answers to these inquiries would contribute art historical insight to the philosophical study of the mind-body problem in the ancient world. Third, since metamorphosis includes environmental transformations (into plants, animals, landscape, and elemental transmutations), one question intuitively arises: how did images of supernatural change clash or coincide with broader philosophies about change in the natural world? Fourth, as attested by Apuleius's Metamorphoses, beliefs about transformation were not limited to a canonical list of Greco-Roman myths, nor were they confined to arts like painting and sculpture. Rather, the metamorphic imagination was itself part of the multicultural environment of the ancient Mediterranean and North Africa, including the spread of Egyptian beliefs. Therefore, what role did Egypt and its masquerades play in the history of the metamorphic image? And how might a closer look at native texts provide a clearer view of Egyptian objects than Western assumptions have sometimes allowed? Investigating such questions would provide us with a more diverse and accurate understanding of metamorphic representation in its multicultural setting. These are the major areas of inquiry I explore in this study.

This dissertation narrates a history of the “metamorphic imagination” in antiquity: the artistic representation of supernatural change in the natural world and the perception of such changes. It is a broad study of metamorphic imagery, both chronologically and

culturally. It focuses on Greco-Roman and Egyptian myths depicted in the Mediterranean and North Africa, as well as how the ancients imagined the concept of transformation (c. 300 BCE – 300 CE). The story mainly arcs from the Hellenistic era — which witnesses the earliest surviving reference to the verb "metamorphose" (Greek: *metamorphoō*) around 200 BCE — and continues until the twilight of native Egyptian religion (c. 300 CE).[12] Occasionally, I also discuss visual and textual examples from earlier eras to better contextualize the main objects in question. No one type of artwork (e.g., paintings, sculpture) or geographical local is the sole focus of scrutiny. Instead, readers contemplate a constellation of diverse objects ranging from Anatolia to Gaul and Egypt. Metamorphic imagery is expressed, for instance, through vibrant frescoes and monumental sculpture, tiny gems and color-changing cups, zoomorphic disguises, and natural monuments—pareidolia which happen to envision the semblance of tormented human faces. Despite this range, my ambition is not to create an exhaustive survey of the art of metamorphosis but to use choice examples to probe key dialectics: bodily change and soulful identity, rationality and enchantment, and the natural world and supernatural power.

I argue that images of metamorphosis were caught up in debates about the enchantment or disenchantment of the gods, bodies, and the natural world. On the one hand, I show how rationalist images debunked metamorphosis by replacing tales about

[12] Literary scholars Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos have shown that the earliest surviving evidence of books devoted to miraculous transformation hail from Hellenistic Egypt (post 200 BCE). In the second century BCE, we encounter Nicander's *Heteroeumena* ("Changed Ones"), and shortly afterward, poems titled *Metamorphoses* by the authors Theodorus and Didymarchus. However, the latter texts are unfortunately now lost though they are listed in the writings of other authors. Gildenhard and Zissos, *Transformative Change*, 41, 48. The former authors provide evidence that predates authors such as Strabo that are commonly cited in other studies, e.g. Stephen Wheeler, "Into New Bodies: The Incipit of Ovid's Metamorphoses as Intertext in Imperial Latin Literature," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 61 (2009): 148.

supernatural change with mere natural events. Such rationalist attacks did not simply employ new artistic compositions but prompted multi-perspectival viewing practices (e.g., anamorphosis) that revealed the fallibility of human sight, thus demystifying "eyewitness" claims regarding mythical change (see chapters two and three). On the other hand, I argue that many images of metamorphosis enchanted spectators, enticing viewers into a state outside the ken of rational sympathies: indulging in reveries about wondrous and unsettling bodies, mysterious spiritual presences, sensory seductions, magic, alchemical change, spectral hauntings, and even delusions of mania (chapters one, three, and four). In “The Metamorphic Imagination…” each of the four chapters contributes novel insights relating to the art and imagination of metamorphosis.

The Metamorphic Imagination: Chapter Contents

Chapter one is titled "Metamorphosis, Cosmic Change, and the Art of Seeing Souls." This chapter contextualizes for the first time how mythical representations of transformation fit amid a zeitgeist that understood the cosmos to be subject to ongoing material changes. From Aristotle onwards, ancient minds imagined the four elements undergoing cycles of "vection," whereby heavier elements such as earth and water would descend lower into the cosmos, even as lighter elements such as air and fire ascended through the heights. Continual cycles of levity and gravity assured that the elements mixed and transmuted into one another again and again. In Ovid's poetic universe, mythical change is set amid such cosmic transformations, though metamorphosis is not reduced to the ordinary motions of the natural world, as the text prompts readers to fantasize about what is still wondrous, magical, and inexplicable. During apotheosis, the soul would cast off its weighty body and ascend into the blazing aether. During the

Roman empire, apotheosis gradually became democratized— not being limited to the Roman emperor — but extended to noble women and men, and the philosophical adept. On the other hand, bodily descensions also produced transformations: when divinities descended from heaven to earth, their numinous force was occluded beneath corporeal matter that often took a zoomorphic guise (e.g., Jupiter as a bull). First, I demonstrate that artists represented apotheosis not just through iconographic means (e.g., an emperor riding an eagle or heavenly chariot) but through the image's materiality. Anciently the stars were often imagined as the home of divinized souls. Moreover, per Aristotle, the soul was not understood to be immaterial but was believed to be made of a refined starry (fifth) element called the aether. Writers like Ovid and Lucretius also imagined that particles of the aether became trapped in the earth during the world's cosmic origins. It was thus natural for writers like Posidippus and Pliny to describe stones with twinkling or comet-like appearances as if they contained starry matter. I argue that such affinities between stones and the stars can lead to a discovery for the history of ancient art: that artists carved portraits of catasterized souls into starry-looking stones that enchanted the minds of spectators. Second, I explore the question, how did artists represent the soul hidden within bestial bodies? I demonstrate that the creation and viewing of metamorphic images were informed by the strange yet popular world of animal physiognomics — how viewers would scrutinize an animal's features to discover its inner personality, indeed its soulful presence.

Chapter two is titled "Rationalism and the Metamorphic Imagination." This chapter resists the assumption that images of metamorphosis always support mythical worldviews. While scholars have noted the ways metamorphic images sometimes

represent myth in ways that depart from textual sources — occasionally pointing out that scenes might betray a rationalist composition (e.g., Actaeon wearing animal skins instead of becoming a stag) — we do not yet fully understand the role of the spectator in the process of rationalizing imagery. Nor do we fully comprehend the worldviews that informed how rationalists imagined metamorphosis and its imagery. The chapter begins by describing how rationalists clashed with believers over the concept of change, pitting changes in the natural world against supernatural change. From Heraclitus to Aristotle and beyond, philosophers held motion and mutation as synonymous principles. For ancient spectators, therefore, motions—including the movements of the human body or a change in physical vantage point—held the potential to transform the appearance of bodies or images of bodies. Indeed, writers like Lucretius contended that seeing bodies from a distance created optical distortions that could account for strange mythical bodies (e.g., hybrids, metamorphosis). Such beliefs about optics and physical movement, I argue, informed the creation and viewing of certain images of metamorphosis. Rationalist images, such as works of sculpture or relief, presented images that were ostensibly supernatural yet disenchanted myth when spectators adopted an alternative vantage point; for instance, in the case of anamorphosis or setting close-looking against distant viewing.

Chapter three is titled "Illusions of Metamorphosis: Insanity, Pareidolia, and the Enchantment of Landscape." In this chapter, I primarily shift away from rationalism and probe two different types of illusions of metamorphosis. First, I examine the affiliation between Bacchic metamorphic imagery and insanity. As explored in previous chapters, metamorphosis involves supernatural bodily transformations in the natural world, including species-crossing, turning into plants, or even landscape. In Bacchic myths, the

god of wine often created perceptual metamorphoses, as viewers lost their wits and hallucinated strange zoomorphic forms that refigured the appearance of human bodies. While the dominant rationalist approach has been foundational to understanding representations of Bacchic myths (social readings, style, iconography, etc.), the theme of hallucinatory mania is usually glossed over.[13] By drawing upon representations of Lycurgus and Pentheus, I argue that images prompted viewers to "see-double," as if they had entered into the manias mentioned in myth. Second, this chapter contributes the first art historical study of sculptural pareidolia. This term is used by psychologists to refer to the way individuals tend to imagine the faces and forms of humans and animals in the accidental imagery of the natural world. Modern examples of this phenomenon include Edward Weston's black and white photographs of peppers whose curvaceous forms twisted light and shadow with an abstract sculptural quality. Despite the artist's best efforts to tout their abstract mysticism and deny intentional figuration, viewers raved about glimpsing the sensuous forms of bodies, lovers, saints, haunting faces, and Freudian imagery **[Figure 0.9]**.[14] While a number of scholars of premodern art have

[13] For example, in one study, stylistic analysis is applied to the Pentheus myth, while the images are used as textual illustrations: Ernesto De Carolis, Gods and Heroes in Pompeii (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2002): 21-22, 45. One textual study of mania is useful, but its descriptions of images are brief and limited to formalistic analysis; there is no mention of how the images themselves might conjure psychological phenomena: Yulia Ustinova, *Divine Mania: Alteration of Consciousness in Ancient Greece* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 174-178; more stylistic analysis is found in Roger Ling, *Roman Painting*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 78, 125,176. Another approach reduces scenes of Bacchic madness to simply the display of high culture: Roger Ling, "The Arts of Living" in John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray eds. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 316. Even studies that focus exclusively on the representation of Dionysiac art at Pompeii may bypass any mention of Bacchic mania and the irrational: Shelley Hales, "Dionysos at Pompeii," *British School at Athens Studies* 15 (2007): 335-341. Elsewhere, the scholarly literature devoted to the Lycurgus Cup is vast and does indeed examine its changeling material qualities. Yet, it does not explore its major mythical themes like metamorphosis and madness (See bibliography in this chapter for the section titled: "Metamorphosis and the Madness of "Bloodthirsty" Lycurgus [c. 300-400 CE]").

studied two-dimensional pareidolic imagery, the relationship between art and other kinds of pareidolic imagery remains essentially unexamined, and we know much less about its imagined connection with mythical transformation. In this chapter, I argue that Greco-Roman writers ascribed metamorphic aetiologies and artistic significance to sculptural pareidolia and aural phenomena: the freakish-looking forms discerned in natural monuments and wilderness sounds or even the haunting echoes of a Roman well-head. Pareidolia blurred the boundaries between nature, the supernatural, and artistic culture, prompting rationalist travelers to disenchant pareidolic phenomena by appealing to philosophical discourses regarding optics and acoustics. Ultimately, pareidolia and insanity shared the tendency for subjects to "see" or "hear" mythical creatures or ghostly presences, which existed mainly as imaginative constructs. In the end, chapter three demonstrates that such metamorphic imagery is as much about the representations that happen in the mind's eye—together with their enchantments or disenchantments—as the material work of art itself.

Chapter four is titled "The Mask of Metamorphosis: Transformation as Masquerade in Egyptian North Africa (c. 300 BCE – 300 CE)." In this chapter, I explore metamorphic imagery in Egyptian (and Egyptianizing) culture during the Greco-Roman era. The chapter takes its cue from book 11 of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, which implicates a fantastical story about an ass-to-human metamorphosis with a description of

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[14] I thank Alex Nemerov for bringing this comparison to my attention. Weston Edward, *The Daybooks of Edward Weston, Mexico: II*. California, ed. Nancy Newhall (New York: Aperture Foundation, 1990), 225. Cf. Cf. Raphaelle Peale's strange and unsettling pictorial visions of embodiment through still lifes. Alexander Nemerov, *The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still Life and Selfhood, 1812-1824* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 11-42.

a masquerade of the cult of Isis. I then examine imagery such as frescoes of masked actors from the Tigrane Tomb (Alexandria), Anubis masks, and a vestment made from crocodile skins. While metamorphic myths often describe miraculous change through the terminology of disguise and clothing (e.g., *induo*), we still lack art historical studies that can fully account for the relationship between disguises and metamorphic change. Moreover, the abiding rationalism does not fully capture the strange and enchanting aspects of such divine deceptions.[15] In this chapter, I aim to diversify, augment, and defamiliarize what counts as metamorphic representation so that it includes masquerading human bodies. Such embodied icons, I maintain, invited wearers and viewers to ponder notions such as verity and subterfuge, the mask and its hidden wearer; exploring how masquerades might change commonplace materials and experiences into a mystifying and enchanting perception of the gods.

Metamorphic Representation: A Brief Primer

Although the focus of this dissertation is not primarily iconographic, it is worth briefly discussing the techniques that ancient artists used to envision transformation through static images. Such a discussion is vital since these techniques are not always intuitive for contemporary viewers, who are accustomed to witnessing shapeshifting happen effortlessly on digital screens. So far, studies of the metamorphic image in Greco-Roman art have identified three primary ways of representing bodily transformation, even

[15] For instance, the iconographic approach provides a foundational understanding of the Tigrane Tomb's images of masked figures. However, it does not explore the phenomenology of this cavernous space and its sense of mystery. Achille Adriani, "Ipogeo dipinto della Via Tigrane Pascià," *Bulletin de la Société archéologique d'Alexandrie* 41 (1956): 63-86; Marjorie Susan Venit, "The Tomb from Tigrane Pasha Street and the Iconography of Death in Roman Alexandria," *American Journal of Archaeology* 101 (1997): 701-729.

if the terminology of each scholar tends to vary somewhat from study to study.[16] This typology can be a helpful primer even if the available evidence is sometimes more chaotic and unpredictable than any crib sheet might allow.

(1) The "after image." This method depicts only the final result of the transformation and is one of the most common ways of depicting a miraculous transformation. We see this method employed in numerous images, such as when Jupiter takes the form of a bull, a swan, an eagle, or a shower of coins.[17] The "after image" provided artists with a shorthand way of representing metamorphosis that was particularly apt for small-scale images (rings, gems, etc.), as when one small cameo depicts the infant Bacchus transformed into a panther **[Figure 0.5].**[18] In such images, contextual cues spark human memories of the myth and allow the viewer to discern that the image is not merely a representation of an ordinary animal but a divinity in animal form.

(2) The "before and after" method, or transformation "in sequence." In some scenes, this method is simply an elaboration of the "after image," except it also shows an anthropomorphic form near the newly transformed body. (For example, when the artist depicts the nymph with a vine sprouting next to her feet or a laurel tree next to her body,

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[16] The iconographic types are best summarized in Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 76-88; and Sharrock, "Representing Metamorphosis," 107.

[17] Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, figs. 10-14, 16.

[18] Bacchus can shapeshift into numerous forms, including leopards or other big cats. Here the young Bacchus nurses from a nymph while taking the form of a leopard. Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 191-194, and n. 93. For another example of a small-scale representation of Leda and Swan, see: "Nicolo ring stone set in a gold ring," c. 1st–2nd century, Nicolo, gold, AD, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 41.160.487

which envisions her transformation into a vine.)[19] The representations of the metamorphoses of polymorphic shapeshifters are often complex since such beings can transform into a wild array of different bodies (or even substances) in rapid-fire succession, often displaying their supernatural mastery of the properties of liquids (e.g., Proteus, Dionysus, Thetis, Nereus, Acheloos, Periclymenes, Mestra).[20] Often the effect is created by depicting multiple metamorphic bodies (each a "before-and-after") close to a larger central anthropomorphic form. During Greek antiquity, artists often represented the struggle between Peleus and Thetis by depicting Thetis's body surrounded by the alternate shapes (snake, watery currents, lion, dolphin, vines, flowers, etc.) into which viewers imagine her taking as successive forms of embodiment **[Figure 0.6]**.[21] When inscriptions are absent, and the imagery varies somewhat from other examples, identifying such scenes as 'metamorphosis' can be very open to debate, leaving the viewer's imagination as the final possible locus of metamorphic representation. A case in point is the inscriptionless Portland vase, whose iconography scholars have debated numerous times (although the dominant interpretation of the scene with the hovering cupid continues to be that it depicts the union of Peleus and Thetis **[Figure 0.7]**.) Suppose the latter interpretation is correct, and indeed the comparative evidence that supports this view is compelling. In that case, the images may show Thetis shapeshifting

[19] LIMC, s.v. "Daphne" nos. 20, 22, 38. Cf. the discussion of the Lycurgus cup in chapter three and Ambrosia's transformation into a vine.

[20] See the discussion of polymorphic deities and liquidity in P. M. C. Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 171-194.

[21] Buxton, *Forms of* Astonishment, figs. 25-26; Alexandridis, "Shifting Species," fig. 6.

into three of her most prominent forms—as a nymph, serpent, and tree.[22] Yet one could also argue that we are witnessing not an image of successive transformations but multiple discrete anthropomorphic, theriomorphic, and phytomorphic figures.

(3) The third iconographic method of representing transformation might be called metamorphoses "in process" or "hybridization." This approach usually depicts a transformation through a single hybrid body, such as the numerous images that show Acteon "growing" antlers from his head as he turns into a stag, or Daphne "sprouting" leaves or branches from the tips of her fingers or around the base of her feet **[Figure 0.8]**.[23] A single scene may also depict alternate perspectives of the transformation process, as when one Etruscan hydria depicts a series of men transforming into dolphins, from foot to head and then from head to feet.[24] Allison Sharrock notes that hybrid-like images of metamorphosis require the viewer's imagination to fill in the semiotic gaps so that one does not misinterpret the image as some hybrid mythological creature.[25] Elsewhere it has also been argued that the metamorphosis of Zeus never takes a hybrid

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[22] A close visual comparison of the Portland Vase, linking it to representations of Thetis' polymorphism, is the following artwork: Attributed to The Marsyas Painter, "Peleus seizing Thetis" (detail), c. 360-350 BCE, red-figure pelike, Attica (Greece), The British Museum, 1862,0530.1. Frances Billot has recently summed up the state of the field with its varied interpretations while offering a lighthearted revisionist account: the "most enduring mythological interpretation for the side with Cupid is that it represents the marriage between Peleus and Thetis…." Frances Billot, "The Morning after the Night Before: A Light-Hearted Interpretation of the Portland Vase," *Journal of the Classical Association of Victoria*, 28 (2015): 84—94, esp. 87.

[23] *LIMC*, s.v. "Daphne" nos. 1, 18, 35; "Actaion," nos. 45-46, 48-81. Other myths represented through "hybridization" include Circe turning Odysseus' men into swine, Dionysus turning the Tyrrhenian pirates into dolphins, Niobe's petrification, and the like. See discussion and images in Sharrock, "Representing Metamorphosis," figs. 15-16; Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, figs. 9, 27-29, 34-35, 36-37, 39-40; Alexandridis, "Shifting Species," figs. 3-5.

[24] Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 76.

[25] Sharrock, *Representing Metamorphosis*, 106-107, 110, 116.

form to not associate him with the grotesque.[26] However, this rule of thumb does not necessarily apply to all other deities, especially polymorphic shapeshifters. Thus, some representations of Thetis depict her shapeshifting prowess through a mixture of forms, as a menagerie of new bodies grows out of (or leaps from) her central form. When Peleus seizes her, sometimes she appears as a fleeing woman who sprouts the forms of flowers from her arms and shoulders;[27] sometimes serpents or vines emerge from her back, her arms smiting her assailant like octopus tentacles;[28] Sometimes she slips away from Peleus's grasp now with a dolphin's tail, now biting him with a lion's jaws, now turning into a tree with scourging branches.[29] Lastly, notice that there are other sea deities—such as Oceanus, Acheloos, or Nereus (the Old Man of the Sea)—whose bodies the artist rendered with mixed forms, which may allude to their shapeshifting prowess. Sea deities were like water itself, the quintessential metamorphic material element, whose liquidity could take solid, liquid, or gaseous forms, and even bring forth life spontaneously. [30]

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[26] Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 82.

[27] "Black-figured Hydria," Peleus seizing Thetis, c. 475 BCE, Greece, The British Museum, 1864,1007.275. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1864-1007-275

[28] "Black-figured oinochoe," Peleus Seizing Thetis, 500 BCE-480 BCE, Greece, The British Museum, 1864,1007.161. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1864-1007-161; Attributed to the Haimon Painter, "Lekythos," Peleus Seizing Thetis, c. 480 BCE, Terra-cotta; black-figure, white-ground, Greece, The Metropolitan Museum, New York, 41.162.207. https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/254378?searchField=All&sortBy=Relevance&ft=41.162.207&offset=0&rpp=20&pos=1

[29] Cf. "Lekythos," Peleus Seizing Thetis, c. 500-475 BCE, Terra-cotta; black-figure, white-ground, Athens, The Louvre, Paris, CA 1887. https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010259852; Cf. LIMC, s.v. "Acheloos," no. 221.

[30] *LIMC*, s.v. "Acheloos," nos. 245, 252, 261a-b. In one Roman mosaic, fish grow out of Oceanus's beard while all manner of life surround him, which the wavy mosaic border (symbolizing the sea) encloses. Engulfed in the liquid expanse, it is as if the water itself could give birth to such plants and animals. "The Oceanus Mosaic," c. 300 – 400 CE, Mosaic, Withington, The British Museum, 1812,0613.1. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1812-0613-1; For images of shapeshifters associated with liquids, see: Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, figs. 22-26. For the general connection between water and shapeshifting in myth, see Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 173.

Methodology: Perceiving Enchantment

My methods explore the perceptual culture of change – both the imagination and sensory encounters — of images of metamorphosis while placing a particular focus on the imagination's disenchantment or enchantment. Here the "metamorphic imagination" encompasses broad cultural worldviews regarding transformation, as well as the specific ways ancient subjects likely perceived transformation in particular images. Physical artworks often exploited a range of ideas about myths and materiality found in textual sources (e.g., the rock-crystal Aphrodite), just as Ovid's poetry describes metamorphic bodies as if they were images (discussed in chapter one). Naturally, the collective understandings of metamorphosis in antiquity were influenced by images, texts, and linguistic valences in a multidirectional and recursive manner.

One significant contribution this study makes to the study of the metamorphic image is its emphasis on imagined changes that subjects discerned through the materials that compose the work of art. Both the metamorphic imagination and the philosopher Gaston Bachelard's (1884-1962) musings about the "material imagination" engender "reveries" in the possibilities of substance and materials. For Bachelard, such reveries involve a wakeful state of dreaming about the four elements (earth, water, air, and fire), which outrivaled formalism and functionality. In choosing to muse about the four elements, Bachelard created his aesthetic philosophy as if it were an echo that redounded and altered the voices of philosophers and poets in Greco-Roman antiquity. In his writings, there are yet other echoes of the metamorphic imagination: alchemical

transmutation; water's Heraclitean flux; the "petrifying reveries" that transform animate life and light into a hardened death, just as stone may also become living flesh; the way materials alone might summon visions about changed motions such as levity or gravity; and numerous connections to Classical myths (e.g., Narcissus, Echo, Neptune).[31] Indeed, as other commentators have noted, Bachelard argues that the imagination and metamorphosis share a deep kinship since the powers of imagination originated in prehistory when humanity began to envision themselves as animals.[32] Similarly, in this study, I uncover the collective imagination of metamorphosis through images, poetry, and natural philosophy.

Enchantment is a protean concept, displaying many forms and faces. It was Max Weber's 1917 lecture "Science as a Vocation" (*Wissenschaft als Beruf*) that sparked academic discussions about the "disenchantment" (*Entzauberung*) of the modern world. In a literal sense, *Entzauberung* means "de-magification," and is translated into English as either "disenchantment" or "demystification." Weber argued that although modern science had made significant advances in technology and understanding of the natural world, it also produced certain intellectual and affective lacunae in human life. Moderns lacked what the ancients (or indigenous people) still had: a sense of ultimate mystery and

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[31] During the 1930s and 1940s, Bachelard published his explorations of the four elements. The relationship between transformation and imagination is found in the following: Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (Boston: Beacon, 1964) 7 ("If all that changes slowly may be explained by life, all the changes quickly explained by fire."); Gaston Bachelard, *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Pegasus Foundation, 1983), 3, 6, 14, 17, 32, 38, 40, 152-153, 155; Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement* (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1988) 1-111; the Gaston Bachelard, *Earth and Reveries of Will: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 2002), 159-179, 262-309.

[32] David Gallagher, *Metamorphosis: Transformations of the Body and the Influence of Ovid's Metamorphoses on Germanic Literature of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009),39; Gildenhard and Zissos, "Metamorphosis: A Phenomenology," 4.

sublime experience resulting from a belief that the world was moved by magical, spiritual, or inexplicable forces. The disenchantment of the world resulted in a state in which "there are, in principle, no mysterious unpredictable forces in play, but that all things – in principle – can be controlled through calculation." Moreover, increasingly complex and specialized technologies meant that fewer and fewer modern people actually understood the objects with which they interacted. Although Weber does not mention the disenchantment of materials specifically, it is implied in his assertion that modern people have become alienated from the objects they use. The modern mind often did not understand how objects were made, what materials were used, and where these substances originated — and yet it demystified such objects because, in theory, one could master their secrets through training and calculation — all this being a feature of the world's disenchantment. [33] Subsequent scholars have explored the specific relationship between enchantment and the visual arts and noted how involved the concept is. In *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment*, David Morgan describes enchantment as a force that seemingly emanates from images and exerts power over viewers. Enchantment displays a spectrum of valences: magic, charm, bewitchment, seduction, fascination, illusion, delusion, and superstition. Moreover, Morgan argues that

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[33] Max Weber, *Max Weber's Complete Writings on Academic and Political Vocations*, ed. John Dreijmanis, trans. Gordon C. Wells (New York: Algora Pub., 2008) 35, 51-52. s.v. "Disenchantment of the world (Entzauberung der Welt)" in Richard Swedberg and Ola Agevall, *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts*, 2nd ed. (Stanford, CA: Stanford Social Sciences, an imprint of Stanford University Press, 2016). Cf. Alfred Gell took an alternative approach, arguing that it is precisely the layperson's lack of understanding of the skills and techniques the artist has employed that mystify the viewers who contemplate the work of art. While a sense of enchantment (or else disinterest) may indeed arise from viewing a work of art whose hidden practices escape apprehension, in this dissertation, I demonstrate through numerous examples how a better understanding of an image's materiality could animate the representations of myths. Alfred Gell, "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology," in *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, ed. Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton, 204 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 40–63; reprinted in Alfred Gell, The Art of Anthropology: Essays and Diagrams, ed. E. Hirsch (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 159–86.

enchantment is not irrational or limited to objects but a practical problem-solving force; how an individual may "bend reality in some way to accommodate one's desire," as with the charisma of an inspiring leader.[34] My study draws upon the definitions of enchantment offered by Weber and Morgan, except that I depart from the way the latter distances enchantment from irrationality. As I show in chapters two and three, ancient rationalists derided miraculous change precisely because it seemed too irrational to be believed.

In antiquity, authors used a variety of terms to describe states of enchantment. In ancient Egypt, enchantment is evoked by terms like *ḥkꜣw* ("magic, magic spells") as well as *šnt* ("spell, conjuration"). And there is yet another term, *imꜣ* ("charmed, delighted, gracious, pleasing, gentle, kind"), which captures how charismatic objects or people may exert their affective spells.[35] The English linguistic roots of enchantment come from the Latin verb *cantare* "to sing," often referring to dangerously enticing songs. As a case in point, Morgan draws attention to the Siren's song in Homer's Odyssey, which spells a grizzly doom to all who hearken to their sounds. Related terms include *incanto* ("to enchant, fix a spell upon") and *excanto* ("to charm forth, enchant, charm"). Sensory seductions are thus implicated in enchantment. Indeed, philosophers often pitted the faculty of reason against sensory experience, which could be illusory and deceptive. One's faculties of attention might also be enchanted. Consider, for instance, the verb *fascino* ("to enchant, bewitch, charm, or fascinate"), as well as *defigo*, which meant "to

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[34] David Morgan, *Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1-2, 4.

[35] Raymond O. Faulkner, A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 2002), s.v. "*imꜣ*," "*ḥkꜣw*," "*šnt*."

fasten" or "fix," but had magical implications too (think of piercing a Voodoo doll), as the term metaphorically envisioned the transfixion of attention ("to strike motionless, astonish, bewitch, enchant"). One might also speak of mythical change as a *miraculum* ("a miracle, wonder, marvel"), while admiring a mythical image might evoke the possibilities of the verb *miror* ("to wonder, marvel, be astonished, admire"). All this grammar of enchantment contrasts with terms like *ratio* ("reason, reckoning, calculation") and *sanus* ("sound, healthy, sane, rational"), and most especially with the hallucinatory insanities of the wine-god's spells (s.v. "*mania*," "*insanus*").[36] In the Greek-speaking world there were yet other terms and ideas. Most generally, the term μαγεύω referred to the magician's arts ("to be a Magus, bewitch"). Elsewhere, enchantment and sensory experience are closely linked, as one can see with the verb θέλγω ("to stroke or touch with magic power") and the related adjective θελκτήριος ("enchanting, soothing; speech that heals"). The poet Moschus also recounts that when the bull-shaped Jupiter gazed at Europa, his eyes had a charming effect, as he "enchanted the girl" ("κατέθελγε δὲ κούρην").[37] One might also describe the magic of music with κηλέω ("to charm, bewitch) or use δέω ("to bind, tie, bind with spells") to describe physical or magical bindings. Enchantment can also have a negative effect on the senses, relating to trickery, blindness, poisoned potions, or even food that is "disguised" in sauce (s.v. καταγοητεύω; cf. Latin *veneficus*).[38] Moreover, in Richard Buxton's *Forms of Astonishment: Greek Myths of Metamorphosis*, he argues that θαῦμα ("astonishment, wonder, marvel") is

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[36] Morgan, *Images at Work,* 1. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "cantare," "incanto," "excanto," "fascino," "defigo," "miraculum," "miror," "ratio," "sanus," "mania," "insanus."
[37] *Europa* 94.

[38] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "δέω," "θέλγω," "θελκτήριος" "καταγοητεύω," "κηλέω," "μαγεύω."

central to thinking about metamorphosis. In mythical sources, spectators are often rapt with wonder and amazement as they view impossible corporeal plasticity. One discerns through such sources again the ways sensory experience holds forth spellbinding powers. While Buxton's textual analysis uncovers the importance of θαῦμα in the Greek imagination of metamorphosis, the chapter he devotes to the iconography of metamorphosis does not fully capture this sense of wonder and amazement, including its materiality and ensoulment, and which I will explore in this study.[39]

The rationalization of metamorphosis also helps us understand enchantment and disenchantment. Consider, for instance, the title of Heraclitus' rationalist handbook: *On Unbelievable Tales: The Deconstruction or Curing of Traditional Myths in which Nature is Violated.* For Heraclitus, myths were problematic as they recounted stories that violated the laws of the natural world. To witness metamorphosis was to witness a change that was sparked by magical forces or divine powers, which elicited wonder precisely because they did not conform to ordinary experience or natural law. Moreover, metamorphic change was unsettling because it violated natural categories by crossing boundaries (crossing genders, species, the mortal-immortal divide) or by joining the rational with the irrational: ensouling human or divine identities within the irrational forms of nature (flora, fauna, etc.). [40] Metamorphosis (and hybridity) was simply unbelievable. So rationalists set about rewriting texts and re-creating images so that they

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[39] Liddell and Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon, s.v. "θαῦμα." Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 1-28, 157-190, and for images: 76-109.
[40] Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer," 62-64. Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 243. Hawes, *Rationalizing Myth*, 201-205. For how rationalism has influenced the scholarship on metamorphosis, see: P. M. C Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1-3.

were less strange, conforming to ordinary experience and anthropocentric worldviews (discussed in chapter two).[41] Not only did metamorphosis assault intellectual understandings of the natural world, but it also violated the nature of the divine as well. Socrates, for example, argued that metamorphosis made divinity into a liar, as gods transformed, seduced, and engaged in divine deceptions. To believe such myths is to make the divine into a "sorcerer" or "wizard" (γόης), with a bag of tricks and illusions.[42] Lastly, it almost goes without mention that some myths delight in the irrational: as Bacchus' powers conjure insane delusions of metamorphic bodies (e.g., the myths of Pentheus and Lycurgus).

All taken together, my quest to understand the enchantment of the metamorphic image explores a litany of possibilities. Enchantment is concerned with the magical, supernatural, and metaphysical possibilities of images. Enchantment violates rationality and its understanding of the divine, bodies, and the natural world. Enchantment brings viewers into imagined states of mania and wonder. Enchantment contemplates changes that create strange bodies or the hauntingly disembodied. Enchantment imagines changes that resist calculation: it involves mystification, deception, and occlusion. Enchantment concerns the alchemical change of matter and its animacy. Enchantment delights in the

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[41] Jacob Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer: Περὶ Ἀπίστων, 'On Unbelievable Tales,'" *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 133 (2003): nos. 1 (Medusa), 2 (Skylla), 3 (Caeneus), 5 (centaurs), 6 (Teiresias), 7 (Pasiphae), 8 (Harpies), 9 (Perseus's winged sandals), 12 (Atlanta and Hippomenes), 14 (Sirens), 15 (Chimaera), 16 (Circe's swine), 17 (fire-breathing bulls), 18 (Hydra), 19 (Spartoi), 20 (Dragon), 23 (Orpheus influence on animals), 24 (Golden fleece), 25 (Satyrs), 28 (Ganymede myth), 29 (Proteus), 30 (animal petrification), 31 (the mares of Diomedes), 33 (Cerberus), 34 (Lamia's metamorphosis), 35 (bird-metamorphoses).

[42] *Republic* 380D: "ἆρα γόητα τὸν θεὸν οἴει εἶναι καὶ οἷον ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς φαντάζεσθαι ἄλλοτε ἐν ἄλλαις ἰδέαις τοτὲ μὲν αὐτὸν γιγνόμενον, [καὶ] ἀλλάττοντα τὸ αὑτοῦ εἶδος εἰς πολλὰς μορφάς, τοτὲ δὲ ἡμᾶς ἀπατῶντα καὶ ποιοῦντα περὶ αὑτοῦ τοιαῦτα δοκεῖν, ἢ ἁπλοῦν τε εἶναι καὶ | πάντων ἥκιστα τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἰδέας ἐκβαίνειν;"

bewitching charms of images: their sensory seductions, transfixion of attention, and representations of wonders that are possible in imagination or art.

The "Soul": A Brief History and Key Concepts

The ancient Egyptians did not believe that identity was dualistic or split between body and soul. Rather, a person's identity was comprised of a variety of aspects, including the name, shadow, heart, the *ka*, and the *ba*. Although the *ba* differed from Greco-Roman notions of the soul in certain respects, the *ba* is the Egyptian term that shares the most similarities, as Late Antique writers translated the *ba* into the Greek word for "soul," psyche (ψυχή). After a person died, the *ba* would travel forth from the tomb during the day, but during the night, it would return to the corpse. The separability of the *ba*'s presence from the body is in some respects similar to Greco-Roman ideas about the soul (e.g., during metamorphosis or transmigration). Yet it was the *ba* itself, rather than the corpse, that possessed metamorphic powers and could change into whatever form the deceased's heart so desired. [43]Although the *ba* has soulful qualities, funerary texts do not describe the *ba* as an immaterial entity. Instead, the *ba* is said to engage in acts that are usually associated with corporeality, such as eating, drinking, and copulating.[44] While the *ba* is "soulful" in the sense that it was understood to be an expression of posthumous personality, such "souls" nonetheless blurred the boundaries between corporeal and incorporeal existence.

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[43] Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 215-216; Mark Smith, *Traversing Eternity: Texts for the Afterlife from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 457, 637; Jíří Janák, "Ba," in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Jacco Dieleman and Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles: UCLA, 2016), 1-2, 4.

[44] John H. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago, IL: University Press, 2001), 20-21; Mark Smith, *Traversing Eternity,* 158.

In Greco-Roman antiquity, there was no unitary definition of the soul (Greek "ψυχή" and Latin "*anima*"). Nonetheless, one can still discern overall historical developments and patterns regarding the relationship between body and spirit. According to A. A. Long, the Homeric era was marked by a belief in "psychosomatic wholes," meaning that bodies and souls were integrated more thoroughly than in later times; and his human characters thought and emoted with the body as much as the mind. A shift occurred around the end of the fifth century BCE when Platonic dualism more sharply divided personhood into categories of the flesh and intellect, body and spirit. For Plato, the immortal soul is capable of being separated from the body and is also the force that animates and moves the body. [45] Over time several different theories emerged regarding the metaphysics of the soul: Platonists held the mind was incorporeal; Stoics maintained that it was a refined spiritual substance that animated the body; and Epicureans thought that tiny atoms comprised the soulful mind. Yet even when philosophers held that the soul was substantial or corporeal, Long maintains, their use of language still enshrined distinctions between the soul and body.[46] Although Plato rejected belief in metamorphosis as it made the gods into deceivers, his dualism is most at home with metamorphic descriptions, in which the soul's identity is transferred to a new body or is separable from flesh entirely (as in the Echo myth). In chapters one through three, I often interpret images in light of such dualism, while the quasi-corporeal attributes of the Egyptian *ba* inform my thinking about transformation in chapter four.

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[45] Sarah Broadie, "Soul and Body in Plato and Descartes," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 101 (2001): 301-308. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self*, 13; A. A. Long, *Greek Models of Mind and Self* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 6, 10, 15-49.
[46] Long, *Greek Models of Mind*, 13.

In the Greco-Roman culture, the gods were also imagined dualistically. Here I follow the analysis of Luc Brisson, a specialist in Platonism and its afterlife in Greco-Roman culture. In his essay, "What is a God according to Plato?," Brisson demonstrates that Greco-Roman subjects largely imagined the cosmos, gods, and mortals dualistically. For Plato, the demiurge created a cosmos that was a kind of body that was endowed with a soul (the "world soul"). In the cosmic hierarchy, the Olympian gods were believed to have souls with immortal bodies. Like human souls, the souls of the gods were endowed with reason and were liable to passions and emotions.[47] Across time — and despite differences between philosophical schools (Platonists, Peripatetics, Epicureans, Stoics) — their descriptions of the gods shared common ground in this respect: "the gods are always considered as living immortal beings, endowed with an indestructible body and a soul that possesses an intellect." Humans differ from the gods in that their bodies are mortal and subject to decay, not because their souls are structurally different.[48] It is this perdurance of the soul that makes metamorphosis (or transmigration) possible, whether it be a god or a mortal that undergoes a miraculous change.

Physiognomic thinking about the soul is also crucial to my analysis. From Pseudo-Aristotle (c. 3rd century BCE) to Polemon (c.90-144 CE) and beyond, Greco-Roman subjects imagined that the workings of human and animal souls could be discerned through bodily signs: the eyes, facial features, and blood vessels were thought to be windows or portals to soulful identity. At first glance, a physiognomic theory might

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[47] For the relationship between motion and the soul, see Luc Brisson, "What is a God According to Plato?," in *Platonism: Ancient, Modern, and Postmodern*, ed. Kevin Corrigan and John Douglas Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 41, 43, 45.

[48] Brisson, "What is a God According to Plato?" 45, 47.

seem to resist body-spirit dualism, as it posits a strong interrelationship between the physical and the metaphysical. However, the reverse was the case for Platonists, who used physiognomy in an effort to discern the underlying personality traits of their students. Part of the thinking was that their souls may have transmigrated and carried various gifts or weaknesses from prior lives. The soul could have a life outside the body, but while inside the body, it was in charge of bodily motions. The physiognomic imagination was also applied to animals in the marketplace. If one wanted the best horse or hound, it necessitated an eye that could discern the mysterious personality traits of an animal's soul. [49] These topics — discerning the soul within or outside the body — are the inquiries we will now explore.

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[49] For the practice of physiognomizing potential students, see Mariska Leunissen, "Physiognomy," in *The Oxford Handbook of Science and Medicine in the Classical World*, ed. Paul Keyser and John Scarborough (Oxford.: Oxford University Press, 2022), 744-746, 748, 753-755. For animal physiognomy, see Antonella Ghersetti, "The Istanbul Polemon," in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain and George Boys-Stones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 479.

CHAPTER 1

METAMORPHOSIS, COSMIC CHANGE, AND THE ART OF SEEING SOULS

Greco-Roman antiquity gave rise to two competing worldviews regarding metamorphosis. First, a magical worldview ("enchantment") depicted astonishing mythological transformations through visual art and poetry and ascribed such changes to magical or supernatural causes. Second, the rise of ancient rationalism offered alternative explanations for the changeability observed in the natural world, and which used texts (mostly) and art to "disenchant" the most implausible aspects of the metamorphic imagination, such as species-crossing (explained in greater depth in chapter two). Although numerous studies have investigated the relationship between rationalism and poetry — especially the paradoxical mixture of science and myth in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* — studies have yet to explore the relationship between images of miraculous change and ancient philosophical worldviews regarding change in the natural world. This chapter explores how poetic and artistic representations of metamorphosis began to appropriate philosophical principles for the sake of enchantment. I especially examine depictions of apotheosis – when mortals ascended to heaven and became divine— as well as when gods, such as Jupiter, descended to earth in animal disguises. The chapter also explores some overlooked questions. For example, how might a better understanding of Greco-Roman cosmology—with its perpetual material transformations—help us understand how artistic materials might be evocative of change? And how might examining the representation of the soul help us better understand images of metamorphosis— especially during moments when the soul ascended or descended through the cosmos? My reading of images is highly indebted to

an exegesis of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* since Ovid most fully conjoins science and myth for the sake of enchantment during the Roman Empire, and his influence was wide-reaching. A better understanding of these questions will help us better understand broad questions regarding the representation of bodily change, the soul's identity, and the natural world.

Natural Philosophy and Supernatural Change in Ovid's Metamorphoses

In the first century CE, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* represents a significant shift in thinking regarding the relationship between rationalism and metamorphosis. As we see in greater depth in chapter two, rationalist philosophers from Plato (424/423 – 348/347 BCE) to Palaephatus (c. fourth century BCE) and Lucretius (c. 99 – c. 55 BCE) ridiculed strange mythic phenomena, including metamorphosis. While philosophers had long investigated changes in the natural world, they essentially did not grant them thaumaturgical explications, whether those were magical potions or divine fiat.[50] It is with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that natural philosophy most fully conjoins with myth, magic, and preternatural power.

Ovid's startling union of philosophy and myth has sparked many scholarly debates. Almost all are in agreement that Ovid's understanding of the natural world gathers a broad array of sources through what Richard Mckim calls a "devil-may-care eclecticism" of philosophical materials (Stoicism, Epicureanism, Pythagoreanism,

[50] Edward Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy: From the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8; Greta Hawes, *Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 6-7.

Aristotle, Empedocles, and the like).[51] Most agree that his two major influences were Stoicism and Lucretius (c. 99 – c. 55 BCE), an Epicurean rationalist, who wrote the *De rerum natura* in verse to present palatably Epicurean philosophy to a Roman audience, and which polemicized against traditional religion, mythology, and the immortality of the soul.[52] Where these secondary authors disagree is in their varied interpretations of Ovid's use of philosophical sources. Ovid's use of natural philosophy has been characterized variously as: a sober theoretical framework for the mythological transformations in the *Metamorphoses*;[53] a witty exposé of "philosophy as inferior to myth in its understanding of man and his world;"[54] a stylistic feature that is purely aesthetic and "merely adventitious" [55] and an attempt to test the boundaries between realism and fantasy that results in a self-reflective deconstruction of both philosophy and poetry as fully adequate means of explaining a chaotic world.[56] However, Leonard Barkan best captures the pith of the Ovidian imagination when he writes that within the world of the *Metamorphoses*:

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[51] Quote from: Richard McKim, "Myth against Philosophy in Ovid's Account of Creation," *The Classical Journal* 80 (1984): 97-108, esp. 97.

[52] Key sources in this discussion are: Frank Egleston Robbins, "The Creation Story in Ovid Met. i," *Classical Philology* 8 (1913): 401-14; William C. Johnson, "Ovid's Cosmogony," *The Classical Outlook* 49 (1971): 41 (sources: Lucretius and Virgil); McKim, "Myth against Philosophy," 97-108; Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 19-37; Philip Hardie, "The Speech of Pythagoras in Ovid Metamorphoses 15: Empedoclean Epos," *The Classical Quarterly* 45 (1995): 204-214; Karen S. Myers, *Ovid's Causes*, 7, 133, 144, 157- 159. Charles P. Segal, "Intertextuality and Immortality: Ovid, Pythagoras and Lucretius in Metamorphoses 15," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 46 (2001): 63-101; David van Schoor, "'Nec me mea fallit imago': Ovid's Poetics of Irony and Reflections of Lucretius and Pythagoras in the Metamorphoses," *Acta Classica* 54 (2011): 125-147.

[53] Otis Brooks, *Ovid as an Epic Poet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 94, 331 and 423; Robert Coleman, "Structure and Intention in the Metamorphoses," The Classical Quarterly 21 (1971): 463.

[54] McKim, "Myth against Philosophy," 97.

[55] Robbins, "The Creation Story in Ovid," 406.

[56] Myers, *Ovid's Causes*, 56-57, 158.

> Magical change is always closely tied to a transforming spirit in the real world of cosmos, society, and human personality. At the same time, no transformation in the poem is ever allowed to be completely "real," scientific, or logical; all changes in the world, whether natural or mysterious, have an element of magic. The extraordinary fascination that the *Metamorphoses* has exercised over two millennia can be traced in large part to this paradox: it proves the natural world magical and the magical world natural.[57]

While Barkan is correct about Ovid's proclivity for describing myths as occurring in a cosmos that operates according to philosophical rules and magical power some caveats are still in order. First, as Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos have demonstrated, part of Ovid's genius as a writer "is a paradoxical insistence that his fictions are historical facts." This blurring of fact and fiction often got him into trouble. In *Amores* and *Tristia,* Ovid claims that his fictions misrepresent his views. Apparently, his girlfriend Corinna was not as ravishing as advertised, metamorphosis was an unbelievable process, and the poet was actually a pious worshiper of Augustus all along. [58] Second, as it relates to the viewing of images of metamorphosis in general, Ovid's private opinions are largely immaterial, since in antiquity and the Middle Ages, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* became a critical source for images, natural philosophy, and myth for centuries to come.[59]

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[57] Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, 19.

[58] Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos, "Introduction to Part I," 2017, in *Transformative Change in Western Thought: A History of Metamorphosis from Homer to Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2017), 72-76.

[59] In one of the most recent assessments of Ovid's influence and the longue durée of metamorphic changes in Western thought, the editors Andrew Gildenhard and Ingo Zissos sum up Ovid's impact quite well: "Ovid's *Metamorphoses* dominates the tradition, peerless in its influence," though if there were a "runner-up" this would be Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*. See "Introduction to Part I," *Transformative* Change, 36. The argument is well established in other scholarly works as well. Ovid's afterlife has left an imprint on ancient, medieval, Early Modern literature and art, and even modern cinema. See all 31 chapters that are devoted to these manifold influences in: John F. Miller and Elizabeth Newlands Carole eds., *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid* (Chichester (UK): Wiley Blackwell, 2014). See chapters 15 through 20 in Philip R. Hardie, *The Cambridge Companion to Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); chapters 7-31 Peter E. Knox and ed., *A Companion to Ovid* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). For Ovid's influence during the Middle Ages on scientific inquiry: Karen S. Myers, *Ovid's Causes: Cosmogony and Aetiology in the Metamorphoses*, 4th ed. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1997) 28.

Metamorphosis as Method in Ovid's Metamorphoses

For Ovid, metamorphosis was not so much a static list of mythological tropes to be categorized.[60] Rather, I suggest that for Ovid, metamorphosis was more like a method; that is, a guiding set of (flexible) principles that informed how Ovid represented transformations in the *Metamorphoses*. The entry point to this approach is detailed in Ovid's poetic incipit. As others have shown, the incipit of ancient books often redefined the *titulus*, which in this case was *Metamorphoses*.[61]

> *In nova fert animus mutatas dicere formas corpora; di, coeptis (nam vos mutastis et illas) adspirate meis primaque ab origine mundiad mea perpetuum deducite tempora carmen!*
>
> The spirit (*anima*) moves [me] to speak of forms (*formas*) changed/moved (*mutatas*) into new bodies/substances (*corpora*); O gods, breathe life (*adspirate*) into my beginnings—for you changed them too—and bring down a continuous poem from the origin of the world down to my own time![62]

Here the Greek title *Metamorphoses* (sing. μεταμόρφωσις) has undergone its own transformation into Latin forms. From this point forward in the poem, Ovid's transformations would be imagined as metamorphic largely for three reasons. First, what Ovid calls *mutatas formas*, "changed forms" or "moving appearances." From Heraclitus to Plato and Aristotle, Greek philosophers had a long posited that the principles of motion and mutation were inextricable from one another (explained in detail later in this

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[60] See ways metamorphosis is parsed through the debates summarized in: Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos, "Metamorphosis: A Phenomenology," in *Transformative Change in Western Thought: A History of Metamorphosis from Homer to Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2017), 4-11.

[61] Stephen Wheeler, "Into New Bodies: The Incipit of Ovid's Metamorphoses as Intertext in Imperial Latin Literature," *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 61 (2009): 147-148. Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, 20.

[62] *Metamorphoses* 1.1-4.

chapter). In the Greco-Roman linguistic imagination, moreover, the principles of motion and mutation were nigh interchangeable. Ancient subjects perceived bodies and objects in the world as "mutable" (Latin "*muto*" "I change, I move") or even "cinematic" (with its roots in Greek "κίνημα," "movement," and "κινέω," "I set in motion, I change").[63] Second, *nova corpora*, "bodies" or "substances" that were "new," "strange," or "unusual." That is, the ancients often called elemental substances "bodies" (*corpora*, σώματα). Richard Buxton, moreover, has argued extensively concerning Greek myths of metamorphosis, that ancient authors describe metamorphosis as an event that elicits *thambos* (θάμβος: "amazement, astonishment, wonder").[64] Third, like Ovid's own poetry, descriptions of mythical metamorphosis often required the animating breath of life, which Ovid evokes through the words *anima* ("soul, breath of life, air") and *spiro* ("to breathe, be alive"). It was the soul that was the breath of life that continued despite manifold changes, except when those changes resulted in the loss of *anima* (e.g., petrification, tragic deaths).[65] "Animation" is thus critical to the many transformations in the *Metamorphoses*. While Ovid, naturally, did not restrict his poetic vocabulary to these

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[63] Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "muto"; Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "κίνημα, κινέω."

[64] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "σῶμα" and "θάμβος"; Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "corpus." There were also other terms used to describe the four elements (e.g. στοιχεῖον, *elementum*). For θάμβος see also: Buxton, "*Forms of Astonishment*," 3, 33, 42, 117, 119, 129, 167, 188, 207.

[65] Barkan and Wheeler describe metamorphosis as *mutatas formas* and *nova corpora* but miss the importance *anima* in Ovid's tales of transformation. Wheeler, "Into New Bodies," 147-148. Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, 20. Linguistically *anima* is at the heart of the many animal forms (*animalia*) in the *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's uses of *anima* (and cognate vocabulary like *mens*) in the *Metamorphoses* are too numerous to list in their entirety. Here is a but a sample: Actaeon's soulful cry to his hounds (3.231); the ascension of Caesar's soul (15.843-851); Aglauros' soul staining her newly formed petrified body (2.832).

terms (*mutatas formas, nova corpora, anima*), such concepts served as guiding principles throughout his work.

Ovid's approach to *mutatas formas*, *nova corpora,* and *anima*, was also inextricably linked to the visual arts. As Paul Balrosky has argued, Ovid incessantly describes metamorphosis as an art; that is, Ovid likens bodily change to paintings, sculptures, textiles, architecture, and the like.[66] Building on these findings, we can add additional linguistic insights. The term "*forma*" is inherently imagistic, meaning "form, contour, figure, shape, appearance."[67] Indeed, Ovid uses *forma* and *imago* as synonymous terms used in parallel fashion. In the story of Tiresias' transformation from a woman back into a man, the poet writes that "his prior form (*forma prior*) was restored, and he came (*venit*) to the image (*imago*) of his birth."[68] Here metamorphosis is an act of motion that moves bodily images into new forms. Elsewhere, Ovid employed *imago* (or synonyms like *simulacrum*: "image, figure, portrait, effigy, statue") to describe many other metamorphic bodies, including Jupiter, Lycaon, and various petrifications like Niobe's:[69]

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[66] Paul Balrosky, "Ovid's Protean Epic of Art," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 14 (2007): 107-120, esp. 108.

[67] Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "forma."

[68] *Metamorphoses* 3.330-31: "isdem forma prior rediit, genetivaque venit imago."

[69] The parallelism of forma and imago is also found in Lycaon's transformation in *Metamorphoses* 1.237-39. "He turns into a wolf, and yet retains some traces of his former shape (*forma*). There is the same grey hair, the same fierce face, the same gleaming eyes, the same picture (*imago*) of beastly savagery." ("fit lupus et veteris servat vestigia formae;canities eadem est, eadem violentia vultus,idem oculi lucent, eadem feritatis imago est."). Compare to Jupiter's *imago* of a wayfarer (*lustro*) in the same myth: "quam cupiens falsam summo delabor Olympo
et deus humana lustro sub imagine terras" (*Metamorphoses* 1.212-13). Perseus turns Eryx into, "a motionless rock, an image in full armor." (*Metamorphoses* 5.199: "inmotusque silex armataque mansit imago"). In the aftermath of the Gorgon's gaze Phineus, "sees images (simulacra) in various attitudes and knows the men for his own."(*Metamorphoses* 5."simulacra videt diversa figuris adgnoscitque suos "). See *Metamorphoses* 5.303-309 for Niobe: "nullos movet aura capillos, in vultu color est sine sanguine, lumina maestis stant inmota genis, nihil est in imagine vivum. ipsa quoque interius cum duro lingua palate

> Her hair stirs not in the breeze; her face is pale and bloodless, and her eyes are fixed and staring in her sad face. There is nothing alive in the picture (*imago*). Her very tongue is silent, frozen to her mouth's roof, and her veins can move no longer; her neck cannot bend nor her arms move nor her feet go.

Ovid's ekphrasis of Niobe's image affirms transformation as the process that decelerates corporeal motion until it eventually becomes utterly immobile. Whereas Homer and other Greek writers had narrated this petrification in a laconic fashion, Ovid's ekphrasis of Niobe's statue details how petrification might conceivably occur as matter gradually slows, condenses, and hardens until a fleshy image turns into solid stone.[70] A reverse process transpires in the Deucalion and Pyrrha myth. Divine power sculpts raw stones into "roughly blocked-out images" of men and women, which gradually become moist and supple (except the bones) and are animated with life.[71] Ovid's conclusion in his final book aptly sums up the way metamorphic bodies seem like animate motion pictures. "All things are in a state of flux, and everything is brought into being as a wavering image (*vagans imago*).[72]

Elsewhere, Ovid's descriptions of transformations often include a spectator and explore the perception of metamorphosis. Consider, for instance, Ovid's description of the quintessential shape-shifter, Proteus:

> Some there are, bravest of heroes, whose form (*forma*) has been once changed and remained in its new state. To others the power is given to assume (*transeo*, "to cross over, pass over, go, be changed") many forms (*in plures figuras*), as to you, Proteus, dweller in the earth-embracing sea. For now men saw you as a youth, now as a lion; now you were a raging boar, now a serpent whom men would fear to touch; now horns made (*facio*, make, fashion, construct) you a bull; often you could appear (*videri*) as a stone, often,

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congelat, et venae desistunt posse moveri; nec flecti cervix nec bracchia reddere motus nec pes ire potest; intra quoque viscera saxum est."

[70] Barkan, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 296. *Iliad* 24.611: "for the son of Cronos turned the people to stones." ("λαοὺς δὲ λίθους ποίησε Κρονίων").

[71] *Metamorphoses* 1.405-6: "sed uti de marmore coepta non exacta satis rudibusque simillima signis."

[72] My translation of *Metamorphoses* 15.178: "cuncta fluunt, omnisque vagans formatur imago."

> again, a tree; sometimes, assuming (*imitates*, "to imitate, portray, represent") the form of flowing water, you were a stream, and sometimes a flame, the water's enemy.[73]

Again, motion is critical to transformation, as Proteus is said to "cross over, pass over, go" (*transeo*) into the series of images he presents. In effect, he is an animate, mobile, gallery of images (*in plures figuras*). When Proteus turns into water and fire, his body is expressly a mimetic representation (*imitor*). When he becomes a bull, he fashions himself (*facio*) as if he were a work of sculpture. Such "galleries" of metamorphic imagery also include spectators, as Ovid often describes corporeal change from the perspective of hypothetical viewers ("men saw you as...", "you could be perceived [*videri*] as...").

In addition, for Ovid, metamorphosis and magic were regarded as kindred arts. Ovid uses the wide-ranging term "*ars*" (parallel to Greek τέχνη, "art, skill, cunning of hand") to describe Medea's magical incantations as well as the fluid shape-shifting "arts" of the water-deity, Achelous.[74] As Charles Segal detailed at length in his final publication before his passing, magic is a recurrent thread throughout Ovid's tales of transformation: potions, spells, and magic wands are the tools of enchantresses and goddesses alike, who "interfere with the normal course of nature (as magicians, of course, usually do)."[75] Indeed, despite Ovid's poetic use of rationalist philosophical sources, he is known to have

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[73] *Metamorphoses* 8.730-737: "sunt, quibus in plures ius est transire figuras, ut tibi, conplexi terram maris incola, Proteu. nam modo te iuvenem, modo te videre leonem, nunc violentus aper, nunc, quem tetigisse timerent,
anguis eras, modo te faciebant cornua taurum; saepe lapis poteras, arbor quoque saepe videri, interdum, faciem liquidarum imitatus aquarum, flumen eras, interdum undis contrarius ignis."

[74] Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary.* s.v. "ars"; Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "τέχνη."

[75] Charles Segal, "Black and White Magic in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses': Passion, Love, and Art," *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 9 (2002): 15.

practiced magic, as when, for instance, his poem, Ibis, amounts to an extensive curse or incantation against one of Ovid's enemies, whom he calls "Ibis."[76]

Cosmic Motion and Transmutation in the Metamorphoses

The first transformation described in the *Metamorphoses* is from chaos to cosmic order. In the beginning, chaos was "a rough, unordered mass of things, nothing at all save lifeless bulk." "No form (*forma*) of things remained the same," and "all objects were at odds, for within one body (*corpore*) cold things strove with hot, and moist with dry, soft things with hard things having weight with weightless things."[77]

However, an unnamed divinity entered chaos and arranged these four elemental 'bodies' in due order, from lightest to heaviest, as water and earth sank to the bottom, air and fire rose to the top. Just above the four elements, Ovid writes that the creator "placed the liquid, weightless aether, which has naught of earthy dregs" (*liquidus* means "clear, bright, transparent, or limpid"). As he did so, suddenly, there appeared "the stars, which had long been lying hid crushed down beneath the darkness," and they "began to gleam throughout the sky."[78]

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[76] Segal, "Black and White Magic," 3.

[77] *Metamorphoses* 1.7-9, 17-20: "rudis indigestaque moles nec quicquam nisi pondus iners congestaque eodem non bene iunctarum discordia semina rerum....nulli sua forma manebat, obstabatque aliis aliud, quia corpore in uno frigida pugnabant calidis, umentia siccis, mollia cum duris, sine pondere, habentia pondus." Centuries earlier Empedocles had posited that love and strife, attraction and conflict, motivated the movements and transmutations of the four elements in their cosmic cycles. See Aristotle's comments on the subject: Aristotle, *Coming-To-Be and Passing-Away* 2.333b.

[78] The ordering of elements is found in *Metamorphoses* 1.57-68. Quotations are found in 1. 67-71: "haec super inposuit liquidum et gravitate carentem aethera nec quicquam terrenae faecis habentem. Vix ita limitibus dissaepserat omnia certis, cum, quae pressa diu fuerant caligine caeca, sidera coeperunt toto effervescere caelo."

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.67-74. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "liquidus."

Indeed, from Aristotle onwards, many thought that aether was the matter that imbued every luminary in the nighttime sky.[79] Next, Ovid recounts that the same unnamed divinity took the elements and "molded the earth into the form of a mighty ball so that it might be of like form on every side."[80] Ovid's overall vision of the cosmos ultimately falls within the Aristotelian tradition in which the elements were arranged into concentric spheres that extended from earth into the aethereal reaches of cosmic space; that is, "five spherical regions," each nested within one another, "earth in water, water in air, air in fire, fire in aether." (We call the sky the atmo-*sphere* for a reason.) [81]

Visual depictions of the primordial moment of creation, with its arrangement of discrete elements, were relatively rare before the Middle Ages, when they increasingly populate the pages of manuscripts, and well into the Early Modern period **[Figure 1.1]**. In Greco-Roman antiquity, artists did not depict the four elements as geometric diagrams but often personified them as anthropomorphic beings — indeed, the elements were sometimes called "bodies" (*corpora*, σώματα).[82] Such terminology, however, likely does not explain the origin of the artistic depictions of elemental personifications since ancient Greek artists personified numerous other concepts and phenomena (e.g., cities, seasons,

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[79] Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy*, 37-38.

[80] *Metamorphoses* 1.34-35: "ne non aequalis ab omni parte foret, magni speciem glomeravit in orbis."

[81] Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy*, 37. The idea of the spherical regions is Aristotle's though the above quote is found in Pseudo-Aristotle's *On the Cosmos*, 392.1-5.

[82] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon,* s.v. "σῶμα"; "Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "corpus." There were also other terms used to describe the four elements (e.g., στοιχεῖον, *elementum*).

sleep, and emotions).[83] It is largely after Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that artists began representing the elements through Prometheus' mythical creation of humanity.[84] One second century CE sarcophagus at the Prado, for instance, depicts this primordial moment **[Figures 1. 2-3]**. One sees a windblown soul gaze at the rocky earth, gently touching it with her toe as if anticipating the union of matter and spirit. Then Prometheus sculpts man from this mass of earth and a stream of water (a nymph with a water jug). Minerva then takes the soul, reshapes it as a butterfly, and places it in the mind of man. As the soul enters the man, his eyes turn and gaze at the goddess. Such eye contact, moreover, was nearly equivalent to glimpsing the spirit through flesh, for there was a widespread belief in Greco-Roman antiquity that the eyes were the window to the soul (see the section "Descending Gods and Discerning Souls within Skin, or The Art of Animal Physiognomy"). Yet this did not necessarily mean that the soul's only locus was the head. In philosophical discourse, the soul's precise region within the body was often debated—though from Chrysippus to Galen, philosophers often posited that the soul permeated the whole body, enabling mobility and perception.[85] In any case, the sculptor of the Prado sarcophagus has envisioned man's primordial

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[83] Amy C. Smith, "Personification: Not Just a Symbolic Mode," in *A Companion to Greek Art*, ed. Tyler Jo Smith and Dimitris Plantzos (Malden: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 440-55.

[84] By contrast, ancient Greek artists opted to depict Prometheus' theft of fire or torture: s.v. "Prometheus," *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae* 7:2 (nos. 80-110).

[85] Christopher Shields, "Theories of Mind in the Hellenistic Period," in *A History of Mind and Body in Late Antiquity*, ed. Anna Marmodoro and Sophie Cartwright (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 37.

metamorphosis as an artistic transformation: turning raw matter and spirit into an animate sculpture.

By the third century CE, a sculptor's hand represented all four elements through a sarcophagus relief at the Capitoline Museum **[Figures 1.4-5]**. Although Paul Zanker and Björn Ewald identified the figures, they largely failed to notice the relief's elemental symbolism: [86] The relief envisions the ascent of the soul (symbolized by Cupid and Psyche). The "soul" is encircled by Tellus (personifying earth), Neptune (water), Vulcan (fire), the airborne chariot (air), the stars as well as Urania, the muse of astronomy (all of which stand-in for the aether and constellations). Again, Prometheus and Minerva shape and animate man, except this time it is the Titan who looks into the man's eyes; his line-of-sight paralleling Urania's contemplation of the aethereal heavens as if glimpsing ensoulment were somehow akin to investigating the starry aether (more on this theme later). On the right, one sees the body die, and the soul, borne aloft with the charioteer, ascends to the heavens. Both conception and death metamorphose the soul. At conception, it changes from a winged woman into the form of a tiny butterfly, but at death, the soul reverts to its original mixed appearance. Zanker and Ewald have remarked that this sarcophagus's "unusual style" makes "it look as if it were carved in wood." [87] However, this unusual appearance is probably due more to its muddy-looking materiality than its style. It seems more likely that

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[86]Paul Zanker and Bjorn Christian Ewald, *Living with Myths: The Imagery of Roman Sarcophagi*, trans. Julia Slater (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 52-53.

[87] Paul Zanker and Bjorn Christian Ewald, *Living with Myths* 52.

the sculptor has chosen a clay-looking stone and thus imitated Prometheus himself, who has placed his sculpture of a man on a pedestal, which he fashioned from clay. In the end, the sarcophagus envisions the life cycle of the departed. Death released the soul into the skies, and any sarcophagus was—the name implies—a "flesh-eater" (*sarkos* + *phagein*), decomposing the body to bones and dust.[88]

In the Ovidian imagination, the elements were subject to cycles of perpetual change. From the dawn of creation, the four elements began to turn and churn in endless rounds of change. As Ovid's fictional Pythagoras explains:

> And even those things which we call elements do not persist. What changes they undergo, listen and I will tell you. In the eternal universe there are four elemental substances. Two of these, earth and water, are heavy and of their own weight sink down to lower levels. And two, air and fire, purer still than air, are without weight and, if unopposed, fly to the upper realms. These elements, although far separate in position, nevertheless are all derived each from the other, and each into other falls back again. The element of earth, set free, is rarefied into liquid water, and, thinned still further, the water changes into wind and air. Then, losing weight again, this air, already very thin, leaps up to fire, the highest place of all. Then they come back again in reversed order; for fire, condensed, passes into thick air, thence into water; and water, packed together, solidifies into earth.[89]

Commentators typically overlook one aspect of this passage. Despite the manifold differences between the ancient world's varied philosophical schools, philosophers posited that the theory that the four elements were constantly rising and falling and transmuting into one another as a physical law of the universe. Almost everyone (Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, Epicureans) shared Empedocles' original belief in the four elements, including their transmutation into one another, even if their philosophies

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[88] Greek σαρκοφάγος is from σάρξ (flesh) + φαγεῖν (to eat).

[89] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15. 237-251.

of matter were unique in other certain respects (e.g., atomism).[90] Yet Aristotle added details that would have great longevity. He used the term "vection" ("κατὰ τὴν φορὰν") to describe Nature's elemental motions, such as "up and down, or the action of levity and gravity," which were physical laws that inevitably led to transformations.[91] Thus, when Ovid describes the elements as "far separate in position, nevertheless are all derived each from the other," he emphasizes the discreteness of the elements yet their interchangeability. Ovid, moreover, describes the process of ascension as one that rarifies and thins materials, whereas movements of descension cause the elements to condense, thicken, and solidify.

The concept of vection was retained in later philosophies of the Stoics and Epicureans as well. As several scholars have shown, Pythagoras' elemental explanation is replete with vocabulary and concepts borrowed from Lucretius.[92] Although the earlier philosopher had argued that atoms were the fundamental substrate of the material world, he still imagined a world in which the four elements were constantly transforming. Lucretius states, "...first fire changes into the winds of the air, from this water is produced, and earth made from water, and back all returns again from earth, water first, then air, lastly fire, and that these change about incessantly, passing from heaven to earth,

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[90] Later in this chapter I discuss in greater depth various philosophical schools and how they each used the basic framework of elemental change for their own ends. Grant discusses Empedocles' theory of the four elements here: Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy*, 14.

[91] Aristotle *Physics* 3.1. 201a 8-9: "ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὴν φορὰν τὸ μὲν ἄνω τὸ δὲ κάτω ἢ τὸ μὲν κοῦφον τὸ δὲ βαρύ."

[92] Ovid's dialogue with Lucretius is universally established, or as put by Barkan: "Had the title not already been used, Ovid might've called his poem *De rerum Natura*." Barkan, The Gods Made Flesh, 27. See also the following sources and relevant bibliography: Myers, Ovid's Causes, 143- 144, 158.
McKim, "Myth against Philosophy," 97 n. 2.

from earth to the stars of the skies."[93] In other words, the motions of the elements cause them to displace one another, each element transmuting into those it was closest to. For the Stoics, a single Creator, rather than the chance collisions of atoms, was the ultimate cause of the material world (Ovid rejects Lucretius' dichotomy by placing atomistic seeds under the control of a single Creator). [94] God was the life force that acted, and the material world was acted upon. The universe, moreover, was imagined as an animate body in itself, always in motion. In Stoic thought, human and animal life were small bodies that fit within the more encompassing corporeality of the universe.[95] Cosmic changes were not without their effects

upon other bodies, as is described by the stoic Epictetus (c. 50 – c. 135 CE):

> And not only has mankind participated in this process of change and transformation, and all the other living beings upon earth, but also those which are divine, and, by Zeus, even the four elements, which are changed and transformed upwards and downwards, as earth becomes water, and water air, and air again is transformed into aether; and there is the same kind of transformation also downwards.[96]

Epictetus' commentary implies that human and animal bodies were ultimately subject to the physical laws of cosmic motion, as substances change through upward and downward fluctuations. Taken together, one can see how Aristotle's vectional theory was not a niche philosophical proposition but permeated the imagination of a wide range of Roman philosophers and poets.

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[93] Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, 782-788.

[94] Michael Lapidge, "ἀρχαί and στοιχεῖα: A Problem in Stoic Cosmology," *Phronesis* 18 (1973): 261; Robbins, "The Creation Story," 404, 409. Myeres, *Ovid's Causes*, 40, 43.

[95] Katja Maria Vogt, "Sons of the Earth: Are the Stoics Metaphysical Brutes?," *Phronesis* 54 (2009): 137-138, 141.

[96] Arrians's Discourses of Epictetus, *Fragments*, 8.

In the *Metamorphoses,* motions of ascension and descension almost always lead to transformations, except, for instance, when Ovid wanted to highlight a god exuding confidence in his own beauty (e.g., Mercury's courtship of Herse).[97] When divinities descended from heaven to earth, they took on the forms of lower life. Gods and goddesses took the bodies of beasts and morphed into mere mortals—the guise of wayfarers and old women were the forms that made up the disguises of descending gods (e.g., myths of Europa, Arachne, Battus). [98] However, the inverse was also true. Ascensions made mortals into gods, and some were catasterized into illustrious stars. It is this latter subject that we will now turn to in detail.

Metamorphic Ascents into the Aether, or How to Become a "Star"

Numerous studies have examined apotheosis in Roman antiquity, especially as it relates to the transformation of Roman emperors. To date, the dominant methods of inquiry have been iconographic and political, often discussing the propagandistic possibilities of ancient reliefs, gems, and the like. It is generally understood that artists represented apotheosis through obvious imagery such as flying chariots, eagles, or a winged emperor (e.g., The Arch of Titus, The Column of Antoninus Pius); or sometimes through physiognomic details that imitated Alexander the Great— the inspired upward-gaze, parted mouth, and waves of hair curly (or leonine) hair.[99] Less well understood are

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[97] *Metamorphoses* 2. 728-729: "volat illud et incandescit eundo et, quos non habuit, sub nubibus invenit ignes." ("Mercury now turns his course, leaves the air and flies to earth, nor seeks to disguise himself; such is the confidence of beauty.")

[98] Here is a sample of these phenomena: the myth of Europa and the Bull (2.833–875; 4.103-107); gods disguised as humans include the mythic encounters of Jupiter and Lycaon (1.199-243), Arachne and Minerva (4.1-145), Battus and Mercury (2.676–707); the metamorphic ascension of Ariadne (8.176-182).

[99] Most broadly "…apotheosis is indicated in several ways: by a depiction of the individual ascending to another realm, by depiction of the individual as a god, or by depiction of the individual seated among the gods": Claire Lindgren, "Apotheosis/Deification," in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Iconography: Themes*

the representational possibilities of materials. How might the medium itself have envisioned the transformation from mortality to divinity? How might materials prompt viewers to imagine the ascension of the soul into the starry aether, or even its catasterism? These are the questions we will explore next.

From the sixth and fifth centuries BCE in Greece until the Roman empire, textual sources allude to the beginnings of belief in catasterism. Sources describe the soul leaving its body at the moment of death and ascending into the aether—the realm of the atmospheric skies, the home of the Olympian deities, and starry space. As the soul ascended to the stars it returned to the source from which it was originally conceived. [100]

Starting with Alexander the Great (356 BCE – 323 BCE), both male and female Hellenistic rulers began to take on the honor of divinity. This tradition was widespread across the Near East and Egypt, where the Pharaohs had already ruled as gods and goddesses for over a millennium. It has been suggested that there were, in fact some intimations of the belief in apotheosis during Republican Rome, as Pompey, Caesar, and

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Depicted in Works of Art: A - L, ed. Helene E. Roberts (Chicago, Ill.: Dearborn, 1998), 47-49, esp. 47. Apotheosis can also be depicted through physiognomic details (upward gaze, lion-like hair, radiant crown, cosmic clipeus etc.): Hans Peter L'Orange, *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture*, 1947 ed. (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 1982) 19-38. An article-length response that largely agrees with L'Orange's artistic readings but departs from his claim that Roman ideas about apotheosis were influenced by the Near East: Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee, "Ruler-Apotheosis in Ancient Rome," *The Numismatic Chronicle and Journal of the Royal Numismatic Society* 3/4 (1947): 126-149, esp. 135-146. Hans Peter L'Orange, *Studies on the Iconography of Cosmic Kingship in the Ancient World* (Oslo: H. Aschehoug, 1953), 60, 90-102. Apotheosis, assimilation to deified rulers, or even catasterism can be conveyed by depicting stars or astrological signs on coins or gems near the face or hair, and often has a propagandistic function. The star-sign "became by the end of the Republic a well-recognized, though not standard attribute of divinity." Robert A. Gurval, "Caesar's Comet: The Politics and Poetics of an Augustan Myth," *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 42 (1997): 46 (citation), 45-160 (discussion of star-sign on coinage); Nandini B. Pandey, "Caesar's Comet, the Julian Star, and the Invention of Augustus," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 143 (2013): 415-423, 430, figs. 1-4, 6-8. Paweł Gołyźniak, *Engraved Gems and Propaganda in the Roman Republic and under Augustus* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2020), 22-31, 97, 113, 189.

[100] Adrian Mihai, "Soul's Aitherial Abode According to the Poteidaia Epitaph and the Presocratic Philosophers," *Numen* 57 (2010): 553-82, esp. 561-563. See the chapter titled "Getting to be a Star: The Politics of Catasterism" in Peter Green, *From Ikaria to the Stars: Classical Mythification, Ancient and Modern*, paperback ed. (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 2011), 234-249.

other local rulers toyed with the idea of divine rulership during life. However, the cult of divine rulers mainly existed from the end of Julius Caesar's life (44 BCE) to Augustus' posthumous divinization (14 CE), until the rise of the Christian emperors, when divine power gradually shifted from the emperor to Christ. [101]

Rituals were central to the process of deification. When viewers witnessed a comet blazing in 44 BCE, it was taken as evidence that Caesar had been welcomed to the celestial home of the gods. Shortly afterward, as Nandini Pandey has argued, the comet "came to be treated as literally identical with Caesar's soul in later sources as the Hellenistic belief in catasterism spread." Since rulers could not always count on such heavenly omens, rituals practice confirmed the deifications of emperors. After the emperor's death, the Roman Senate officially decreed the emperor's divinity. Shortly afterward, they held a public funeral for the emperor. As the fire started raging, the emperor's body was combusted on a pyre, releasing his soul to return to the aether, or at least it appeared that way, as flames liberated an eagle from its wax cage.[102]

The emperor was not the only one who could take divine honors or ascend to the aetherial heavens above. After 38 CE, moreover, it was common for members of the imperial family, such as Drusilla, Caligula's sister, to be consecrated as divine. As contextualized by Mary Boatwright, "Before the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty four

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[101] General overview: "Apotheosis," in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Ancient Mediterranean Religions*, ed. Eric M. Orlin, et al. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2016), 79. More specific: Toynbee, "Ruler-Apotheosis," 126-130, 143-149. Aleš Chalupa "How Did Roman Emperors Become Gods? Various Concepts of Imperial Apotheosis," *Anodos: Studies of the Ancient World* 6-7 (2006-2007): 201; Aleš Chalupa, "Roman Emperors: Gods, Men, Something Between Or An Unnecessary Dilemma?" *Religio: Revue pro religionistiku* 15 (2007): 257.

[102] Pandey, "Caesar's Comet," 416. Chalupa, "How Did Roman Emperors Become Gods?" 203-204; Green, *From Ikaria to the Stars*, 243-244.

females, but only three males, had been consecrated. The *domus divina* was more than a vague term."[103] Outside pertaining to the Imperial family, there were other ways that a soul could be divinized. The ancient Greek belief that heroic or noble souls would ascend to heavenly heights continued into Roman times. Philosophers (especially Platonists and Pythagoreans, but also Stoics) held that philosophy allowed one to undertake "flights of the mind" during mortality and thus gain a clearer picture of the world. In the afterlife, philosophy allowed one to "tread the aether" as the soul "looked down on humankind from the flaming ramparts of eternity" (to use M. J. Edwards phrasing).[104] Even the Epicurean Lucretius, who argued against the immortality of the soul, nonetheless envisioned the intellectual apotheosis of Epicurus: "he whose intellect surpassed humanity, who quenched the light of all as the risen aetherial Sun ("*aetherius sol*") quenches the stars."[105] Cicero's (106 – 43 BCE) description of the *Dream of Scipio* supplies an interesting visual description of a democratized view of heaven. In Scipio's dream, his soul ascends into the Milky Way, contemplating the earth and the heavens, while deceased relatives (his grandfather Scipio the Elder and father Aemilius Paulus) explain awe-filled questions about physics, metaphysics, and the meaning of life. In this vision, Scipio learns that all those who serve their country dutifully and renounce earthly

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[103] Mary Taliaferro Boatwright, *The Imperial Women of Rome: Power, Gender, Context* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 149; See chapter 4 "Female Divinities: The Divae and Their Priests" in Gwynaeth McIntyre, *A Family of Gods: The Worship of the Imperial Family in the Latin West* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016) 93-110.

[104] Mark J. Edwards, "Treading the Aether: Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* 1.62-79," *The Classical Quarterly* 40 (1990): 465-469. Green, *From Ikaria to the Stars*, 237, 240, 244-249. Pandey, "Caesar's Comet," 422-423 (and commentary in n. 47); Gurval, "Caesar's Comet," 63.

[105] *De Rerum Natura* 3.1043-1044: "qui genus humanum ingenio superavit et omnis restinxit, stellas exortus ut aetherius sol."

pleasures can inherit the heavenly heights and become “a god;" meaning any intelligent being who has controlled the body with skillfulness as the supreme God governs the universe, will ascend to into the aether and become divine. [106] We should not, then, expect images of ascension or deification to be limited to the emperors.

Scholars continue to debate precisely to what extent the emperors were actually considered to be gods during their own lifetimes (as opposed to the afterlife just discussed). The answer seems to vary depending on the factors such as the demeanor of particular emperors, whether they were located in Rome or some distant land where living apotheosis was often more readily accepted, and many other factors. What we can conclude is that the boundaries between mortals and gods were often blurred as ruling elites tested and pushed the limits of what society would tolerate.[107]

In the Roman imagination, the prototype of deified royalty was Romulus and his wife Hersilia, whose deifications were patterned on Hellenistic assumption stories.[108] As Ovid recounts, apotheosis was a metamorphic transformation that involved the ascension of the soul, as gross matter burned off into divine forms that soared heavenward. In Ovid’s text, Mars descended, “downward through the air” and halted “on the summit of the wooded Palatine.” As the god snatched Romulus, they ascended into the air. The Roman hero’s “mortal part dissolved into thin air, as a leaden bullet hurled by a broad

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[106] Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobius and William Harris Stahl, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 76, 134.

[107] Chalupa, "Roman Emperors," 256-270. Gallinus’s reign is said to be the high point of living emperors assuming divine honors: Toynbee, “Ruler Apotheosis,” 139, 147-149.

[108] “Apotheosis,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia*, 79. Green, *From Ikaria to the Stars*, 244, 247-249; Pandey, "Caesar's Comet," 416, 422.

sling is wont to melt away in the mid-heavens. And now a fair form clothes him, worthier of the high couches of the gods." (This fine form is not described in detail, but perhaps it is not a coincidence that the imagery of the fiery bullet passing across the sky presents the mind with a picture akin to a shooting star, such as Julius Caesar's well-known comet).[109] Indeed, a star does appear as Iris descends from heaven to earth in astral form, as she snatches and bears Hersilia aloft upward through the air. "There a star from the high aether came gliding down to earth, and Hersilia, her hair bursting into flame from its light, goes up together with the star into thin air." Now "as a goddess is she joined once more to her Quirinus;" that is, the deified Romulus.[110] Ascension is thus the evanescence of mortality, a meteoric burst into the aethereal flames, as the ascendant soul burns with the substance of the stars**.**

Sometimes it is easy to pick out such ascension scenes through their iconography. One sardonyx gem, for instance, represents Augustus' soul catasterized with his zodiacal star, Capricorn **[Figure 1.6]**. Other examples show an emperor ascending to aethereal glory on the back of an eagle, as a winged soul, receiving a wreath of victory, or riding a chariot heavenward. The eagle motif, again, reflected the ritual practice of releasing an eagle into the air as a visual emblem of the divine ruler's posthumous metamorphosis.[111]

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[109] The full description of apotheosis is found in *Metamorphoses* 15.816-828: "adnuit omnipotens et nubibus aera caecisocculuit tonitruque et fulgure terruit orbem.quae sibi promissae sensit rata signa rapinae,innixusque hastae pressos temone cruento inpavidus conscendit equos Gradivus et ictuverberis increpuit pronusque per aera lapsusconstitit in summo nemorosi colle Palatireddentemque suo iam regia iura Quiritiabstulit Iliaden: corpus mortale per auras dilapsum tenues, ceu lata plumbea fundamissa solet medio glans intabescere caelo;pulchra subit facies et pulvinaribus altisdignior, est qualis trabeati forma Quirini."

[110] *Metamorphoses* 15. 846-851: "ibi sidus ab aethere lapsum decidit in terras; a cuius lumine flagrans Hersilie crinis cum sidere cessit in auras: hanc manibus notis Romanae conditor Urbis excipit et priscum pariter cum corpore nomen mutat Horamque vocat, quae nunc dea iuncta Quirino est."

[111] For eagle in ritual and art see: Franz Valery Marie Cumont, *After Life in Roman Paganism: The Funeral Rites, Gods and Afterlife of Ancient Rome - The Silliman Foundation Lectures Delivered at Yale*

In the British Museum, the well-known ivory panel of the pagan Aristocrat Symmachus envisions the process of apotheosis **[Figures 1.29-30]**: a team of elephants pulls a giant statue of the deceased in a wheeled shrine, while just above, eagles soar heavenward from a funeral pyre. The uppermost scene freezes in time, that fleeting moment just before Symmachus touches eternity. As the winds bear him toward the arc of the zodiac, his eyes gaze upward, his hand stretches across the heavenly veil, his fingers are poised just moments before clasping the hand of some heavenly hero (or long-lost friend); his head now rises into the veil with its river-like waves, perhaps envisioning Ovid's "liquid weightless aether," or else the ivory conjures in the mind the "milky" streams of the Milky Way, where the blessed dead where divinized (more on this shortly).[112]

Elsewhere, I argue that even when an artwork displays no obvious imagery of apotheosis, artists nonetheless could use the material qualities of stones to depict the soul's ascent into the aether through more abstract means. Yet before these ideas can be understood, we will need to understand better the material aesthetics of the aether, a subject that has only recently begun to be explored in the study of Greek antiquity but not in the Roman imagination. The elemental theory of the aether had an incredibly long durée, reaching from ancient Greece until the Victorian era.[113]

University (New Haven: Yale University, 1922), 155-159; Rudolf Wittkower, "Eagle and Serpent. A Study in the Migration of Symbols," *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2 (1939,): 295-296, 300, 311, figs. a-e. Larry Kreitzer, "Apotheosis of the Roman Emperor," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 53 (1990): 211-212; Simon Price, "The Consecration of Roman Emperors," in *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies*, ed. David Cannadine and Simon Price (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992) 56-58, 60-61, 94-95. Chalupa, "How Did Roman Emperors Become Gods?" 203-205, esp. n.31.

[112] Elsner's description is apt, but more focused on the lower scenes: Jaś Elsner, *Imperial Rome and Christian Triumph: The Art of the Roman Empire AD 100-450* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 30-32.

[113] The aether-theory was finally disproven by Albert Michelson and Edward Morley: Adrian Mihai, "Soul's Aitherial Abode According to the Poteidaia Epitaph and the Presocratic Philosophers," *Numen* 57 (2010): 553-82, esp. 553.

Anaxagoras (c. 500 – 428 BCE) provided one of the first philosophical theories of the aether, portions of which would have great longevity, though his views must largely be reconstructed from later sources. For Anaxagoras the aether's etymology seemed to reveal its very nature, likely deriving aether from *aitho* (αἴθω), meaning "to light up, kindle, burn, or blaze."[114] In Anaxagoras' cosmogony the primordial state of the universe was an unlimited chaotic mixture of all the elements. In this state the aether permeated all things. As described by Patricia Curd, if there had been an observer, one would have seen the incandescent aether penetrate the dark, moist air, and "the original mixture must have been like a dense bright cloud."[115] Later, Nous (mind) began to sets the elements in motion and separated them into an orderly cosmos. The aether, which once permeated everything, was now spread across the cosmos along the continuum. Its natural upward motions spread it from the earth's bowels to heaven. It left behind traces in the caverns of the planet explaining the sounds of earthquakes; when the hot aether mingled with wet clouds, it produced the flash of lightning in the gloom of cloudy skies. But most of all, the celestial luminaries were endowed with aetherial fire, which "snatched up stones from the earth by the vigor of its rotation and having ignited them, it has turned them into heavenly bodies."[116] Even now, "The sun, the moon and all the heavenly bodies are fiery stones

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[114] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon,* s.v. "αἴθω,"; Mihai, "Soul's Aitherial Abode," 554. *Meteorologica* 1.339b 21-26: "ὁ γὰρ λεγόμενος αἰθὴρ παλαιὰν εἴληφε τὴν προσηγορίαν, ἣν Ἀναξαγόρας μὲν τῷ πυρὶ ταὐτὸν ἡγήσασθαί μοι δοκεῖ σημαίνειν· τά τε γὰρ ἄνω πλήρη πυρὸς εἶναι, κἀκείνους τὴν ἐκεῖ δύναμιν αἰθέρα καλεῖν ἐνόμισεν" ("for what is called the aether was given this name in antiquity. Anaxagoras seems to think that the name means the same as fire, since he considered that the upper regions are full of fire and that the ancients meant by "aether" the substance which fills them.")

[115] Patricia Curd, "Anaxagoras," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2019/entries/anaxagoras/>.

[116] *Testimonia* D36: "Ἀναξαγόρας τὸν περικείμενον αἰθέρα πύρινον μὲν εἶναι κατὰ τὴν οὐσίαν, τῇ δὲ εὐτονίᾳ τῆς περιδινήσεως ἀναρπάσαντα πέτρους ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς καὶ καταφλέξαντα τούτους ἠστερωκέναι."

which are carried along by the rotation of the aether." Sometimes the celestial fire would briefly careen downward as well, as "the so-called shooting stars descend from the aether like sparks, and that is why they are extinguished at once."[117]

Aristotle agreed with Anaxagoras that aether enveloped the starry regions but rejected the notion that these upper regions were made of fire.[118] For Aristotle, the aether had a much more capacious (and creative) range of etymological meanings: "*aei*" (ἀεί, "ever") plus "*theō*" (θέω, "to role, move," but also "shine, gleam") captured the ever-moving brilliance of the starry skies. Moreover, he may have also had the word *theios* (θεῖος, "divine) in mind. For that which was in eternal motion is "divine in nature, and [thus people] decided to call a body of this kind aether, as it is different from all terrestrial things."[119] The belief that the stars were divine was widespread in the Greco-Roman world, but perhaps here Aristotle specifically as Empedocles in mind, who called this element "divine aether" (αἰθέρα δῖαν).[120] The aether, then, could not be one of the four elements (such as fire) but was another. Later tradition called it "quintessence" or "the fifth element," but Aristotle thought of it as the first of five elements.[121] Friedrich Solmsen long ago noted,

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[117] *Testimonia* D4.6:"ἥλιον δὲ καὶ σελήνην καὶ πάντα τὰ ἄστρα λίθους εἶναι ἐμπύρους, συμπεριληφθέντας ὑπὸ τῆς <τοῦ> αἰθέρος"

[118] Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy*, 37-38.

[119] *Meteorologica* 1.339b 26-28 "τὸ γὰρ ἀεὶ σῶμα θέον ἅμα καὶ θεῖόν τι τὴν φύσιν ἐοίκασιν ὑπολαβεῖν, καὶ διώρισαν ὀνομάζειν αἰθέρα τὸ τοιοῦτον ὡς ὂν οὐδενὶ τῶν παρ᾽ ἡμῖν τὸ αὐτό·" For Aristotelian etymologies of aether see: the Loeb commentary for note “d” on the same page as this passage states: "As if αἰθήρ were derived from ἀεί and θεῖν, with a play on θεῖος as well." Efstratios Theodossiou, "The Different Meanings of the Term 'Ouranos' and the Importance of Aether in Aristotle's Works on the Heavens and on the Cosmos," *Astronomical and Astrophysical Transactions* 23 (2004): 82-83. s.v. “ἀεί,” “θέω,” (1 and 2), *A Greek-English Lexicon.*

[120] In *On the Soul* (1.404b 13-14) Aristotle quotes Empedecoles as saying: "γαίῃ μὲν γὰρ γαῖαν ὀπώπαμεν, ὕδατι δ᾽ ὕδωρ, αἰθέρι δ᾽ αἰθέρα δῖαν, ἀτὰρ πυρὶ πῦρ ἀΐδηλον, στοργῇ δὲ στοργήν, νεῖκος δέ τε νείκεϊ λυγρῷ." ("By Earth we see Earth, by Water Water, By Air the divine Air [αἰθέρα], by Fire destroying Fire, Love by Love, and Strife by bitter Strife.")

and subsequent scholars have followed suit, that the aether was the divine element, and as such, it was necessary for the generation of the soul. In Aristotle's *Generation of Animals,* we learn:

> Now so far as we can see, the faculty of Soul of every kind has to do with some physical substance which is different from the so-called "elements" and more divine than they are; and as the varieties of Soul differ from one another in the scale of value, so do the various substances concerned with them differ in their nature. In all cases the semen contains within itself that which causes it to be fertile—what is known as "hot" substance, which is not fire nor any similar substance, but the pneuma which is enclosed within the semen or foam-like stuff, and the natural substance which is in the pneuma; and this substance is analogous to the element which belongs to the stars.[122]

Life, then, could not be created from any of the four common elements. It emerges from semen that was charged with the "hot substance" of *pneuma*, whose life force (Aristotle seems to imply) is derived from the divine aether.

Belief in the aether's divinity and consequent power to generate life are concepts that are found in a variety of other Greco-Roman thinkers. In a fragment of an unidentified play, Euripides (c. 480-406 BCE) wrote: "But you, maiden [scil. Helen?], were born from the aether, which is called Zeus by humans. Do you see this unlimited aether up on high, which holds the earth all around in its moist embrace? Consider this to be Zeus, think that this is a god." The aether is thus imagined as a divinity that engenders souls and to whom

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[121] In *Meteorologica* (1. 339b 18) Aristotle calls it "the primary element" (τοῦ πρώτου στοιχείου); Christian Wildberg, *John Philoponus' Criticism of Aristotle's Theory of Aether* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 12; James G. Lennox, "Biology and Cosmology in Aristotle," in *Cosmology and Biology in Ancient Philosophy: From Thales to Avicenna*, by Ricardo Salles (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 112.

[122] Friedrich Solmsen, "The Vital Heat, the Inborn Pneuma and the Aether," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957): 119-123. By the first century BCE the concept of aether and pneuma had become nearly indistinguishable in certain Stoic circles: Samuel Sambursky, *Physics of the Stoics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 34. *Generation of Animals* 2.736b 30-737a 1: "Πάσης μὲν οὖν ψυχῆς δύναμις ἑτέρου σώματος ἔοικε κεκοινωνηκέναι καὶ θειοτέρου τῶν καλουμένων στοιχείων· ὡς δὲ διαφέρουσι τιμιότητι αἱ ψυχαὶ καὶ ἀτιμίᾳ ἀλλήλων, οὕτω καὶ ἡ τοιαύτη διαφέρει φύσις. πάντων μὲν γὰρ ἐν τῷ σπέρματι ἐνυπάρχει, ὅπερ ποιεῖ γόνιμα εἶναι τὰ σπέρματα, τὸ καλούμενον θερμόν. τοῦτο δ᾽ οὐ πῦρ οὐδὲ τοιαύτη δύναμίς ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐμπεριλαμβανόμενον ἐν τῷ σπέρματι καὶ ἐν τῷ ἀφρώδει πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ἐν τῷ πνεύματι φύσις, ἀνάλογον οὖσα τῷ ατῶν ἄστρων στοιχείῳ"

the soul returns after the death of the mortal body. The idea is not far from stoic Zeno's declaration (preserved in Cicero) that "the aether is god."[123] By the first century BCE, Alexander Polyhistor would remark that souls had once emerged from the aether, while Cicero (106–43 BCE) stated the "fiery heat of heaven that is entitled the aether or sky" was the element that was "most adapted for the generation of living things" (including the divine stars).[124] Virgil, for his part, would envision untainted souls returning to vaulted skies in "the aetherial since and pure flame of spirit" (aetherium sensum atque aurai simplicis ignem). And even when the Epicurean Lucretius disenchanted the aether of its divinity, he nonetheless imagined it like the elemental spark of life; raindrops were the means through which "father Aether" inseminated "Mother Earth," causing the animation of all manner of plant and animal life on earth.[125] Similar ideas were likely present in the mind of Ovid, who re-enchanted the Lucretian model. Ovid vacillates between two creation models: God may have animated humanity from his "divine substance," or else an equally divine source was needed, namely, the heavenly aether that had fallen to the earth, which Prometheus used to animate primordial man.[126] As a whole, the zeitgeist fits Arius Didymus's (1st

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[123] Euripides: *Early Greek Philosophy* (Dramatic Appendix) 9 T45: "ἀλλ᾽ αἰθὴρ τίκτει σε, κόρα, Ζεὺς ὃς ἀνθρώποις ὀνομάζεται. ὁρᾷς τὸν ὑψοῦ τόνδ᾽ ἄπειρον αἰθέρα καὶ γῆν πέριξ ἔχονθ᾽ ὑγραῖς ἐν ἀγκάλαις; τοῦτον νόμιζε Ζῆνα, τόνδ᾽ ἡγοῦ θεόν." Zeno (via Cicero): *De Natura Deorum* 1.36: "Atque hic idem alio loco aethera deum dicit."

[124] A. A. Long, "The eclectic Pythagoreanism of Alexander Polyhistor," in *Aristotle, Plato and Pythagoreanism in the First Century BC: New Directions for Philosophy*, ed. Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 153. *De Natura Deorum* 2. 39-45: "Quare cum solis ignis similis eorum ignium sit qui sunt in corporibus animantium, solem quoque animantem esse oportet, et quidem reliqua astra quae oriantur in ardore caelesti qui aether vel caelum nominatur. Cum igitur aliorum animantium ortus in terra sit, aliorum in aqua, in aëre aliorum, absurdum esse Aristoteli videtur in ea parte quae sit ad gignenda animantia aptissima animal gigni nullum putare."

[125] *Aeneid* 6.747. *De Rerum Natura* 1.250-264.

[126] *Metamorphoses* 1.76-88.

century BCE) brief comment that the concepts of aether and spirit (*pneuma*) had become nearly indistinguishable in certain philosophical circles.[127] In antiquity, then, the aether's divinity and power to engender souls made it the most mysterious of the elements, as it blurred the boundaries between physics and metaphysics.

However, as extensive as Aristotle's descriptions of this celestial aether were, they nonetheless do not fully provide aesthetic descriptions that would be useful to the art historian. For such reports, our best surviving ancient Greek sources are Plato's *Phaedo* and *Timaeus.* Andrea Nightingale has recently argued at length that Plato's descriptions of the aethereal realms depart from his general allergy toward *poikilia* (ποικιλία) or "variegation." Instead, "he emphasizes the superabundance of colorful and shiny phenomena" where the aether dazzled the eyes. She also draws attention to Plato (and many other writers), who described the aether with the term *marmaruge* (μαρμαρυγή), meaning "flashing, sparkling, gleaming" or "seeing sparks." The earthly *marmaruge,* or "quick twinkling" of dancers' feet, was thus like the choral dances of the stars.[128] We can also add that in the *Timaeus*, Plato describes the cosmic aethereal air as *euagestaton* (εὐαγέστατον), meaning most “shining, clear, bright, brilliant” or “distinguished.” It contrasts with the darker air that is variously described with words like *tholeros* (θολερός, "turbid"), *homixle* (ὁμίχλη, "a mist, a fog"), and *skotos* (σκότος, "darkness, gloom").[129] In *Phaedo*, moreover, Socrates describes further details about the aethereal realms, which included Olympus as

[127] Sambursky, *Physics of the Stoics*, 34.

[128] Andrea Nightingale, "The Aesthetics of Vision in Plato's Phaedo and Timaeus," in *Gaze, Vision, and Visuality in Greek Literature*, ed. Emmanuela Bakola, Alexandros Kampakoglou, and Melina Tamiolaki (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018) 331-353, esp. 332, 336-341, 347-348.

[129] Plato, *Timaeus* 58.D. Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "εὐαγής, θολερός, ὁμίχλη, σκότος"; Montanari, Goh, and Schroeder, *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*.

well as the "true earth" in the celestial firmament, just below the perfect realm of forms. Those who attain this realm see the gods face to face and breathe the luminous aether, for "what air is for us is the aether for them."[130] To stride among the stars above was to be dazzled by the *poikilia* of a wealth of materials in the true earth:

> "But over there, the whole earth is made up of such colors, but far brighter (λαμπροτέρων) and purer (καθαρωτέρων) than these. One part is of sea-purple (ἁλουργής) of marvelous beauty, another is like gold, and all that is white is whiter (λευκοτέραν) than chalk or snow, and the earth consists of other colors like this, even more numerous and more beautiful than the sort we have seen here. For even the very hollows in it, being filled with both water and air, offer an appearance of color as they gleam (στίλβοντα) in the variety (ποικιλίᾳ) of the other colors so as to give the appearance of a single continuous decorated surface. On this, being of such a nature, things that grow do so in proportion: trees, flowers, and fruits. And again in the same way the mountains and the rocks by the same proportions have a smoothness (λειότητα) and transparency (διαφάνειαν) and finer colors. We even have prized fragments of these gemstones (λιθίδια) down here: carnelians, jaspers, emeralds, and everything of this kind; but up there there's nothing that's not of this kind and they're even more beautiful than those here. The reason for this is that those stones are pure and not eaten away or damaged, like the ones here, by corrosion and brine from sediment that has collected together, which causes deformity and disease to stones and earth and also to animals and plants. But the earth itself is adorned by all of these and furthermore by gold and silver, and again the other things of this sort. You see, they are naturally visible, being many in number and large and all over the earth, so seeing it is a spectacle (θέαμα) for fortunate observers.[131]

Amid the glittering aethereal air, the other materials became brighter and more colorful. Instead of a typical body of water, celestial waves seem to glint with a golden light on a liquid purple ground. Instead of dusty earth, the landscape was encrusted with an

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[130] Phaedo 111.b:"ὃ δὲ ἡμῖν ἀήρ, ἐκείνοις τὸν αἰθέρα."

[131] *Phaedo* 110c-111a: "ἐκεῖ δὲ πᾶσαν τὴν γῆν ἐκ τοιούτων εἶναι, καὶ πολὺ ἔτι ἐκ λαμπροτέρων καὶ καθαρωτέρων ἢ τούτων· τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἁλουργῆ εἶναι καὶ θαυμαστὴν τὸ κάλλος, τὴν δὲ χρυσοειδῆ, τὴν δὲ ὅση λευκὴ γύψου ἢ χιόνος λευκοτέραν, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἄλλων χρωμάτων συγκειμένην ὡσαύτως, καὶ ἔτι πλειόνων καὶ καλλιόνων ἢ ὅσα ἡμεῖς ἑωράκαμεν. καὶ γὰρ αὐτὰ ταῦτα τὰ κοῖλα αὐτῆς, ὕδατός τε καὶ ἀέρος ἔκπλεα ὄντα, dχρώματός τι εἶδος παρέχεσθαι στίλβοντα ἐν τῇ τῶν ἄλλων χρωμάτων ποικιλίᾳ, ὥστε ἕν τι αὐτῆς εἶδος συνεχὲς ποικίλον φαντάζεσθαι. ἐν δὲ ταύτῃ οὔσῃ τοιαύτῃ ἀνὰ λόγον τὰ φυόμενα φύεσθαι, δένδρα τε καὶ ἄνθη καὶ τοὺς καρπούς· καὶ αὖ τὰ ὄρη ὡσαύτως καὶ τοὺς λίθους ἔχειν ἀνὰ τὸν αὐτὸν λόγον τήν τε λειότητα καὶ τὴν διαφάνειαν καὶ τὰ χρώματα καλλίω· ὧν καὶ τὰ ἐνθάδε λιθίδια εἶναι ταῦτα τὰ ἀγαπώμενα μόρια, σάρδιά τε καὶ ἰάσπιδας καὶ σμαράγδους καὶ πάντα τὰ τοιαῦτα·e ἐκεῖ δὲ οὐδὲν ὅτι οὐ τοιοῦτον εἶναι καὶ ἔτι τούτων καλλίω. τὸ δ' αἴτιον τούτου εἶναι ὅτι ἐκεῖνοι οἱ λίθοι εἰσὶ καθαροὶ καὶ οὐ κατεδηδεσμένοι οὐδὲ διεφθαρμένοι ὥσπερ οἱ ἐνθάδε ὑπὸ σηπεδόνος καὶ ἅλμης ὑπὸ τῶν δεῦρο συνερρυηκότων, ἃ καὶ λίθοις καὶ γῇ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ζῴοις τε καὶ φυτοῖς αἴσχη τε καὶ νόσους παρέχει. τὴν δὲ γῆν αὐτὴν κεκοσμῆσθαι τούτοις τε ἅπασι καὶ ἔτι χρυσῷ τε καὶ ἀργύρῳ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις αὖ τοῖς τοιούτοις. ἐκφανῆ γὰρ αὐτὰ πεφυκέναι, ὄντα πολλὰ πλήθει καὶ μεγάλα καὶ πανταχοῦ τῆς γῆς, ὥστε αὐτὴν ἰδεῖν εἶναι θέαμα εὐδαιμόνων θεατῶν."

extravagant array of stones and metals that were constantly gleaming, diaphanous, and apparently ubiquitous (carnelians, jaspers, emeralds, silver, gold, etc.). Near the stars, "there's nothing that's not of this kind (i.e., gemstones) and they're even more beautiful than those here." Moreover, the small stones (λιθίδια) that exist on the lower earth are but fragments of the super-radiant heavenly gems. Plato was not the first nor would he be the last to envision a heaven that was comprised of precious materials. As has been described by others, from ancient Mesopotamia to medieval Christianity, artists and writers envisioned the heavens as a yawning firmament of brightly colored stones.[132]

Small colorful stones (or glassy simulations) were an ideal medium for representing the soul's ascent into the aether. An overlooked but relatively common theme was for artists to carve sardonyx so that the "fiery" part of the stone was shaped into a woman's hair. For instance, one cameo at the British Museum depicts an Augustan Princess in the form of Diana. When examined at night under candlelight, the stone's aetherial "transparency" would set this woman's sizzling coiffeur ablaze with light **[Figures 1.12-13]**. [133] Here it is critical to observe Ovid's wordplay when he describes the divinization of Hersilia during

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[132] Paul T. Nicholson, "'Stone... That Flows': Faience and Glass as Man-Made Stones in Egypt," *Journal of Glass Studies* 54 (2012): 12; Cynthia J. Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015) 5, 41-42, 194; Barry, *Painting in* Stone, 5-17. From pagan to Christian antiquity, artists also engraved stars, moons, or solar imagery frequently into a variety gemstone, as can be seen in various essays in: Chris Entwistle, *Gems of Heaven: Recent Research on Engraved Gemstones in Late Antiquity*, C. AD 200-600 (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 2011). 15, 51, 55, 57, 66, 69, 78, 83, 85, 89, 110, 216.

[133] For other examples of the fiery-hair motif in gems that likely depict imperial women in the guise of divinities, see: "Cameo: Venus," c. 1st century BCE -1st century CE, three-layered sardonyx, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, ГР-12493, https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/18.+carved+stones/1002344; "Cameo: Juno," c. 1st century BCE -1st century CE, sardonyx, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, ГР-12695, https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/18.+carved+stones/1002546; "Cameo: Juno," 1st century CE, sard, agate onyx, The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, ГР-12715, https://www.hermitagemuseum.org/wps/portal/hermitage/digital-collection/18.+carved+stones/1002566

her heavenly ascent. Her burning "*crinis*" ("hair") echoes the *verb* "*crinio*," which can refer to the making of "a hairy star," that is, a "comet" with a fiery trail of hair **[Figure 1.13]**. Indeed, the Greek word for comet was "*aster cometes*" (ἀστὴρ κομήτης), meaning a "star with long hair," which was analogous to Latin *sidis crinitum*.[134] In Ovid's account of Julius Caesar's catasterism, the emperor is promised to attain the "aetherial seats and his related stars." After Venus takes him upward in the air, his soul, "mounted up and, leaving behind it a fiery train (i.e., "hair," "*crinis*"), gleamed as a star.[135] Unlike Roman coins that explicitly depict Venus with a star in her hair, or celebrate Julius Caesar's apotheosis by depicting a star adjacent to his hair, engraved sardonyx envisions catasterism through its fire-like layers.[136]

The well-known Blacas Cameo is another case in point **[Figures 1.14-15]**. For all the scholarship that has examined this well-known piece, most modern interpretations have largely stripped it of its original enchantment. From the 19th century to the present, the dominant readings of this object have largely been political, with brief mentions of Augustus' apotheosis (as if this small piece were put on view before the masses like large-scale propaganda).[137] Roman subjects likely did not approach this object with a kind of

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[134] Pandey, "Caesar's Comet," 415-416; Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*. s.v. "crinis" and "crinio"; Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "κομήτης."

[135] *Metamorphoses* 15.839 ("aetherias sedes cognataque sidera tanget") and 848-850 ("luna volat altius illa flammiferumque trahens spatioso limite crinem stella micat.")

[136] Pandey, "Caesar's Comet," 415-423, 430, figs. 1-4, 6-8. The motif ultimately owes a debt to the astral imagery that haloed Alexander the Great: L'Orange, *Apotheosis in Ancient Portraiture*, 23.

[137] Fabio Barry has mentioned that "when the cameo was held up to the light the background would glow, materialising the halo of the emperor's genius or divinity." Such readings, however, are far from the majority.
Fabio Barry, "A Whiter Shade of Pale: Relative and Absolute White in Roman Sculpture and Architecture," 2011, in *Revival and Invention: Sculpture through its Material Histories*, ed. Sébastien Clerbois and Martina Droth (New York: Peter Lang), 31-62, esp. 46-47. In fact, 19th century readings of the Blacas Cameo focused on Augustus' "nobility." During the 20th and 21st centuries the language of was largely

cool political nonchalance, even if apotheosis was not an apolitical theme. Greco-Roman gems had a long association with magic, likely not far from how this gem was once imagined. Consider, for instance, how Augustus' aegis depicts the quintessential personifications of fear, awe, and apotropaic magic (Phobos and the Gorgon), thus protecting the ruler from harm and "petrifying" viewers in place before Augustus' transfigured form;[138] that is, the Blacas Cameo functions much like those gems whose abstract material displays conjure the catasterism of elite women **[Figures 1.11-12]**. When ancient subjects examined it closely under candlelight or held it forth to the sun, they witnessed something akin to the conflagration of matter **[Figures 1.14-15]**: Augustus stands with a placid expression amid a nubilous ground that combusts with the aura of his divinization. The images' material properties summon a vision of Augustus' apotheosis in the celestial aether as if one had captured his meteoric glow in the palm of one's hand. The eyes contemplate an astral soul in an arguably more eloquent way than when zodiacal imagery makes his catasterism explicit **[Figure 1.6]**.

The notion that stones might luminesce or change colors under varied phenomenal conditions and thus be imagined as composed of starry matter was not foreign to Greco-

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nobility was dropped, but the dominant artistic interpretations continued to be political, often with a succinct mention of Augustus' apotheosis: e.g., John Henry Middleton, *The Engraved Gems of Classical Times: With a Catalogue of the Gems in the Fitzwilliam Museum* (Place of publication not identified: publisher not identified, 1891), 63 ("...a very noble portrait-bust of Augustus in profile"). Dyfri Williams, *Masterpieces of Classical Art* (London: British Museum Press, 2009), 296 ("we should think of Augustus on the Blacas Cameo as a fighting ruler"). Michael Grant, *Art in the Roman Empire* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 112 (Sardonyx cameos served "the same sort of propogandist purpose as large-scale public reliefs and medallions"). Paweł Gołyźniak, *Engraved Gems and* Propaganda, 247-248 ("This cameo then communicates an important propaganda message that turns into panegyric tones.").

[138] For magical representations of the Medusa on gemstones see various references in the anthology: Entwistle, *Gems of* Heaven, 50, 63, 100-101, 180.

Roman minds. Consider, for instance, Pliny's recapitulation of the ideas of Archelaus (fl. 5th century BCE) and other unnamed authors:

> Archelaus writes that the Carthaginian stones have a somewhat swarthy appearance, but light up more intensely than the rest when they are viewed by firelight or sunlight, and at an angle. He mentions also that they appear purple indoors in shadow, and flame-red in the open air; that they sparkle when they are held against the sun, and that, when they are used as signets, they melt the wax, even in a very dark place. Many writers state that the Indian stones are brighter than the Carthaginian, and that conversely they become dull when viewed at an angle. They add that the male Carthaginian stones have a blazing star inside them, while the female stones shed all their radiance externally.[139]

This passage may not be referring explicitly to sardonyx per se, though such stones still can be found in Tunisia (ancient Carthage) and India. Instead, we see here a glimpse into broader debates about the phenomenal appearances of various exotic stones, ranging from North Africa to India. As witnessed with cameos we have seen thus far, certain stones might seem to display radiant surfaces or even "have a blazing star inside them;" meaning that sunlight or candlelight might change stones from purplish hues to "flame-red" or from a dark "swarthy" appearance to one that intensely “lights up.”

Although the aether’s natural home was the region of the moon, stars, and planetary spheres, it also extended to the colorful atmosphere. Referring to the atmospheric elements and the aether, Seneca (4 BCE - 65 CE) observed that they “mingle their properties so gradually that you cannot tell whether it is atmosphere or already aether.”[140] Whoever has spent time contemplating the sky at dawn or dusk, or gazed in wonder when the sunset

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[139] *Natural History* 37. 93-99: "Archelaus Carchedonios nigrioris aspectus esse, sed igni vel sole et inclinatione acrius quam ceteros excitari; eosdem obumbrante tecto purpureos videri, sub caelo flammeos, contra radios solis scintillare, ceras signantibus his liquescere, quamvis in opaco. multi Indicos Carchedoniis candidiores esse et e diverso inclinatione hebetari scripsere, etiamnum in Carchedoniis maribus stellam intus ardere, feminas fulgorem universum fundere extra se"

[140] Seneca, *Natural Questions* 2.14. "paulatim ista in confinio vim suam miscent ita ut dubitare possis aer an hoc iam aether sit." For commentary see: Liba Taub, *Ancient Meteorology* (Florence: Taylor and Francis, 2004), 156-157.

gives way to those first intimations of starlight, immediately recognizes their protean displays of brilliant color **[Figure 1.21]**. From Homer's description of "rosy-fingered dawn" to Aristotle's theories about rainbows and color-changing skies to Ovid's descriptions of "clouds which flush (*inficio*, "to stain, tinge, dye, color") beneath the sun's slant rays"—poets and philosophers alike were not blind to the chameleonic effects of the aethereal atmosphere.[141] To look up at the kaleidoscopic skies at sunset, twilight, and midnight was to witness the heavens pass through various phases of aethereal incandescence. This span from the atmosphere to stars was the domain of meteorology, where air, fire, and aether interpenetrated one another. Each element was, to a certain extent, transparent, thus allowing for the production of color when light (fire or the fire-like aether) passed through transparencies, even as the most intense and vibrant displays of color revealed greater concentrations of fire or the fiery-aether.[142] Consider, for instance, one glass cameo, which depicts three unidentified individuals who likely once held some distinction in Roman society. In the Greco-Roman imagination, the portrait's colorful translucency would have shared affinities with aethereal light, as the glass mimics the sky's chameleonic transitions at twilight **[Figures 1.21-22]**.

When deified individuals underwent their metamorphic ascents, their souls were imagined to pass through the atmosphere, sometimes blazing like comets or filled with the Milky Way's nebulous radiance. The *Dream of Scipio* describes the Milky Way as the soul's

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[141] *Metamorphoses* 3.182-183; Alice P. Radin, "Sunrise, Sunset: *hmos* in Homeric Epic," *The American Journal of Philology* 109 (1988): 293-307, esp. 293-295. Raymond L. Lee and Alistair B. Fraser, *The Rainbow Bridge: Rainbows in Art, Myth, and Science* (University Park (Pa.): Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 105-109; Richard Sorabji, "Aristotle on Color, Light and Imperceptibles," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 47 (2004): 130.

[142] Sorabji, "Aristotle on Color," 130,132.

heavenly home par excellence. It is from this region that souls are born, and all dutiful souls will return to the same region. Scipio describes the circle of stars as "of surpassing brilliance gleaming out amidst the blazing stars."[143] Yet amid all these heavenly flames, Scipio emphasizes the milkiness of the galaxy's name and appearance. (Indeed, our word "galaxy" originates from the Greek term "*galaxias*" [γαλαξίας, "Milky Way," from "*gala*" [γάλα, "milk"], and cognate to Latin "*lac*," "milk, milk-white color").[144] The logic was that the soul, having spent eons in milky brilliance, would, in its infant state, naturally continue to seek nourishment from milk; so says Pythagoras via Macrobius's commentary on Scipio's night vision. Moreover, as souls ascended to (or descended from) the Milky Way, they would pass through astral portals, namely, Cancer during the soul's descent and Capricorn during the soul's ascent. As Macrobius recounts, "Capricorn, [is] the portal of the gods, because through it souls return to their rightful abode of immortality, to be reckoned among the gods." [145] In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes the Milky Way as a region that was famed for its "*candor*," meaning "a dazzling, glossy whiteness" or "clear luster." The region was imagined as a heavenly Palatine, where the mightiest gods dwelled closest to Jupiter, and lesser divinities or illustrious individuals inhabited the surrounding neighborhood. [146] When the ancients looked up at the clear night skies, their fingers could

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[144] Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobius and William Harris Stahl, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 72, 94. Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon.* s.v. "γαλαξίας," "γάλα"; Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*. s.v. "lac."

[145] Stahl, *Dream of Scipio*, 134.

[146] Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1. 168-176 (Milky Way), 9.239-272 (e.g. Hercules' deification); Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*. s.v. "candor."

trace the arch of the Milky Way until they glimpsed Jupiter himself, the brightest "star" in the aethereal heights (see the planet Jupiter at the bottom of **Figure 1.7**).

Not only was multilayered sardonyx an apt medium for imagining meteoric deifications, but it could also be evocative of the soul's destination in the Milky Way. Consider, for instance, one sardonyx-cameo of the Emperor Claudius (10 BCE – 54 CE) and his wife Messalina (c. 17 – 48 CE). They drive a chariot of dragons (winged serpents) up to celestial heights and are transfigured together (in imitation of Romulus and Hersilia). For minds that were primed to imagine the soul's deification in the Milky Way, this sardonyx's cloudy swirls of milky white against a dark ground may have seemed to capture the misty lights one can contemplate when gazing at the Milky Way, especially when the night sky is crisp and unpolluted (as it was in antiquity, of course, when there was no back-glow from city lights). By the second century, the "Milky Way aesthetic" was still in fashion, as seen in one large sardonyx-cameo from the Landesmuseum in Württemberg. It is thought to depict Marcus Aurelius (121 – 180 CE) and his wife Faustina I (c. 100 - 140 CE), who are joined in eternal union, and who have metamorphosed into the image and likeness of Jupiter and Juno during their "Holy Wedding" **[Figures 1.9-10]**. [147] The artist has carved two phosphorescent layers that stand out from the gloomy ground: the appearance of the outer layer is meteoric, displaying blazing hair and attire, while the inner lamination reveals "milky" yet phosphorescent skin. As has been argued in-depth by others, the Greek terms which are often translated as "white" and "black" (λευκός, μέλας,) are not so much descriptions of hue, as they are of brightness and darkness, the contrast of

[147] See description of: "Cameo with Marc Aurel and Faustina minor as Iuppiter and Iuno," 170-185 CE, sardonyx, Landesmuseum Württemberg, Arch 62/3, https://www.landesmuseum-stuttgart.de/sammlung/sammlung-online/dk-details/?dk_object_id=409

which was often called “phosphorescence” when referring to the night sky. [148] Thus, to call the appearance of the stone’s inner layer “white-hot” would be a true expression of the ancient zeitgeist. For the flesh of the gods and deified mortals is often described as “*candidus*,” meaning “white” but also "shining," or as the writer Servius puts it, "bathed in a certain brilliant light.” Indeed, the Latin term “*lucere*” (“to shine”) is thought to have arisen from the Greek word for "white" (*leukos*). Homer used the latter to describe the incandescent heat of the forge and the blinding glory of the sun. The Gospel of Matthew reveals a cross-cultural understanding: the garments of the transfigured Christ become "white as the light" ("λευκὰ ὡς τὸ φῶς") when Christ’s transfigured countenance blazes with the sun’s glory (Matthew17:2). [149]

Throughout Roman antiquity, artists used various media to simulate the twinkle of starlight against a dark ground; or, to use Aristotelian language, "light breaks out from a dark blue or black background."[150] A painted depiction of a model of the heavens can be observed in one fresco from the house of the Vetii in Pompeii **[Figure 1.16]**. Urania (from οὐράνιος, "heavenly"), the Muse of astronomy, provided the god's-eye view of the aetherial stars as she points to a dark-blue planetarium that glints with golden lines, which, in actual practice, would have represented planetary courses, eclipses, the zodiac, including catasterized beings. This globe's glossy appearance fits with the poet Claudian's (c. 370 –

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[148] Richard Sorabji, "Aristotle on Color, Light and Imperceptibles," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 47 (2004): 129-140, esp. 130.

[149] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon,* s.v. “λευκός,” “μέλας”; Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*. s.v. “candidus,” “lucere.” Fabio Barry, "A Whiter Shade of Pale: Relative and Absolute White in Roman Sculpture and Architecture," 2011, in *Revival and Invention: Sculpture through its Material Histories*, ed. Sébastien Clerbois and Martina Droth (New York: Peter Lang, n.d.), 31-62, esp. 37-41.

[150] Full sentence: *Meteorologica* 1.342b 15-16. "Τὰ δὲ χάσματα ἀναρρηγνυμένου τοῦ φωτὸς ἐκ κυανοῦ καὶ μέλανος ποιεῖ τι βάθος ἔχειν δοκεῖν."

c. 404) description that some planetariums were made of glass, as well as astronomical descriptions of the "crystalline sky."[151] In one of Philostratus' (fl. 3rd century) ekphrases, he describes a painting of Cupid entertaining himself with a planetarium, the "plaything of Zeus." "The ball itself is of gold; the stitching on it is such as to be assumed by the mind rather than seen by the eye, and spirals of blue encircle it; and very likely, when it is tossed in the air, the radiance emanating from it will lead us to compare it with the twinkling of stars." [152] Whether blue imagery was placed on a gold ground (e.g., the well-known Mainz globe) or vice versa, both conjured the aethereal heavens in the mind's eye. The appearance of such celestial orbs, glinting with blue and gold, is also reminiscent of stones that were imagined to emulate starlight. As has been described by others—from the civilizations of ancient Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and into the Middle Ages—premodern minds imagined lapis lazuli as the quintessential star-like medium.[153] In antiquity, the Greek term

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[151] Giovanni Di Pasquale, "Scientific and Technological Use of Glass in Graeco-Roman Antiquity," in *When Glass Matters: Studies in the History of Science and Art from Graeco-Roman Antiquity to Early Modern Era*, ed. Marco Beretta (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2004), 67– 70. Describing "Archimedes' Sphere": *Shorter Poems* 51.1-4: "Iuppiter in parvo cum cerneret aethera vitro, risit et ad superos talia dicta dedit: "hucine mortalis progressa potentia curae? iam meus in fragili luditur orbe labor?" ("When Jove looked down and saw the heavens figured in a sphere of glass he laughed and said to the other gods: "Has the power of mortal effort gone so far? Is my handiwork now mimicked in a fragile globe?"). Cf. the mundo vitreo in *Shorter Poems* 43.1-4.

[152] *Imagines*, Boys at Play 8.5-9: "Ὁρᾷς καὶ τὴν τέχνην ἐν τῇ γραφῇ; χρυσοῦ μὲν αὕτη, ῥαφὴ δὲ αὐτῇ οἵα νοεῖσθαι μᾶλλον ἢ ὁρᾶσθαι, ἕλικάς τε κυανοῦ ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτῆς ἑλίττουσα καὶ ἀναρριφεῖσα τάχα που τὸ ἀποχωροῦν σέλας μαρμαρυγαῖς ἀστέρων εἰκάζειν αὐτὴν δώσει."

[153] Mesopotamia and Egypt: Wayne Horowitz, *Mesopotamian Cosmic Geography*, 2nd ed. (Winona Lake, Ind: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 167; Fabio Barry, *Painting in Stone: Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 4-17. Greco-Roman: Lisbet Thoresen, "Archaeogemmology and Ancient Literary Sources on Gems and Their Origins," in *Gemstones in the First Millennium AD: Mines, Trade, Workshops and Symbolism:International Conference, October 20th-22nd 2015, Römisch-Germanisches Zentralmuseum, Mainz*, ed. Susanne Greiff and Alexandra Hilgner (Mainz: Verlag des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums, 2017), 162. Jeffrey Spier, "Precious Gems in Poetry in the Hellenistic Royal Courts," in *Art of the Hellenistic Kingdoms: From Pergamon to Rome*, by Kiki Karoglou, ed. Seán A. Hemingway (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2019), 31-37, esp. 32. Medieval: Benjamin Anderson, *Cosmos and Community in Early Medieval Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 23.

"sapphire" (σάπφειρος) actually described what we would now call lapis lazuli, and as Martin Bernal has claimed that the word came out of a complex Egypto-Semitic linguistic family tree that may also have given birth to the Greek word *sphaira* (σφαῖρα), "sphere, ball" (Latin *sapphirus* → Greek *sapheiros* → Hebrew *Sapîr* → Egyptian *Sbꜣ*, which was represented with a star hieroglyph, meaning something like, "star, pieces from the blue crystalline firmament in which they were set."). A more certain etymology is that our current designation "lapis lazuli," is medieval in origin, in effect meaning "stone of heaven" (Latin *lapis* "stone" + *lazulum* "heaven, sky," from Persian *lazhuward* "heaven, sky").[154] In ancient Greece, the epigrammatic poet Posidippus (c. 310 – c. 240 BCE) called lapis lazuli "star-like" since it was filled with "gold"; or rather, its sky-blues are characteristically shot through with particles of gold pyrite, mimicking the starry night sky **[Figure 1.17]**.[155] If one wanted even further evidence, one need only consider an intaglio of Serapis from the British Museum. The glittering mineral inclusions pass across the deity's face, but where the pyrite is the densest, the artist has inscribed the image of a star as if "X" (the "star") marks the aetherial spot **[Figure 1.24]**. Nearby, a soul in the form of a butterfly lands upon the basket that rests on the deity's head, perhaps alluding to the soul's affinity for the divine presence in the aether. As far back as Homeric writings, we find divinities and heroes described as *kuaneoi* (κυάνεοι) or even *kuanochaita* (κυανοχαῖτα), meaning

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[154] See "Sbꜣ," and "Sbꜣ σφαῖρα" in Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization Volume I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 265-267; "Lapis Lazuli," Maurice Waite, *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013); Christopher A. Faraone, "Text, Image and Medium: The Evolution of Greco-Roman Magical Gemstones," 2011, in *British Museum Research Papers*, ed. Chris Entwistle and Noël Adams, vol. 177, *Gems of Heaven: Recent Research on Engraved Gemstones in Late Antiquity* (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 2011), 54-55, esp. note 46.

[155] Spier, "Precious Gems in Poetry," 31.

"blue," and "blue-haired." It is thought that this idea may be indebted to the Egyptian belief in deities that had hair or other facial features that were encrusted with lapis lazuli.[156] Just as lapis lazuli envisioned the astral countenances of divinities, it was also used to depict the portraits of Greek and Roman rulers (not to mention Sasanian kings), as is evident from intaglios in the British Museum **[Figures 1.17, 25]**.[157] In the case of the image of Perseus of Macedon (and the Serapis intaglio), the artist has carved the stone so that the pyrite veining streaks across the face, likely recalling the Milky Way's hazy band of sidereal matter as it cuts across the night sky. For ancient minds which imagined lapis lazuli as a star-like medium, such portraits would have likely been tantamount to a declaration of one's apotheosis in the starry aether.

Lapis lazuli was exceptionally rare and costly, so ancient artists often imitated its celestial appearance by using faience, glass, or alternative stones that could convey the much-sought-after night-blue aesthetic, especially if they could display some golden

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[156] Marco Beretta, *The Alchemy of Glass: Counterfeit, Imitation, and Transmutation in Ancient Glassmaking* (Sagamore Beach: Science History Publications, 2009) 20; Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, "Hair and Social Status in the Near East and Early Greece, c. 900-300 BC," in *Dress in Mediterranean Antiquity: Greeks, Romans, Jews, Christians*, by Alicia J. Batten and Kelly Olson (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2021), 178-179.

[157] For Sasanian stamps in lapis lazuli see: Stamp-seal bezel engraved with a bearded male portrait bust, late Sasanian, lapis lazuli, The British Museum, London, 120385, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1885-0929-17; Stamp-seal and bezel engraved with bearded with a bearded bust of a man (possibly a king), 3rd century, lapis lazuli, The British Museum, London, 119995, https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/W_1849-0623-18

Note that the Parthian king Vardanes (40/45 CE) pronounced judgment in Babylon below a lapis lazuli dome that twinkled with aetherial light: Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 1.25.3: "…a domed roof imitating a kind of sky, roofed with lapis (this stone is extremely blue and heavenly to look at), and images of the gods whom the Persians worship were set up on high and looked golden, as if they were in the aither. This is where the king [Vardanes] sits in judgment…" (τὸν ὄροφον ἐς θόλου ἀνῆχθαι σχῆμα οὐρανῷ τινι εἰκασμένον, σαπφειρίνῃ δὲ αὐτὸν κατηρέφθαι λίθῳ (κυανωτάτη δὲ ἡ λίθος καὶ οὐρανία ἰδεῖν), καὶ θεῶν ἀγάλματα, οὓς νομίζουσιν, ἵδρυται ἄνω καὶ χρυσᾶ φαίνεται, καθάπερ ἐξ αἰθέρος. δικάζει μὲν δὴ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἐνταῦθα).

twinkle.[158] As a case in point, consider a small (2.5 cm) portrait bust of Faustina the Younger (130-175/176 CE) from The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg **[Figure 1.26]**. Faustina's face is assimilated into the form of Venus, while the bi-colored sapphire envisions a bright face (and neck) that gradually emerges from a night-blue bust. When candlelight flickered within the translucent stone, Faustina's countenance would likely seem to be set aglow with astral light (similar to the comet-like blaze of miniature portraits wrought in sardonyx or agate). Yet, in a way, this portrait's material rhetoric strives for more glory than what lapis lazuli's pyrite scintillations could offer: the viewer sees only scattered flecks of darkness, so that, in effect, Faustina's "stardom" has (largely) overtaken the night itself. Another example is a nicolo intaglio of the emperor Alexander Severus (c. 208 – 235 CE) **[Figure 1.23]**. It lacks the pyrite glitter of lapis lazuli, but the stone's highly polished golden sheen can still mentally conjure a transfigured visage set within the cool night air. Glass workers also used various techniques to create objects that rivaled the appearance of lapis lazuli (and other heavenly gems), and perhaps even exceeded its golden star-like appearance.[159] For example, one ribbed mosaic bowl from Yale University Art Gallery has molten spiral sections of yellow-green and white canes set within a dark blue matrix **[Figure 1.19-20]**. The result is a pattern that rivals the blue-gold coloration of lapis lazuli bowls, which were used in ancient Mesopotamia.[160] Like radiant stars, one sees

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[158] Beretta, *The Alchemy of Glass*, xi-xii, 3, 21; Paul T. Nicholson, "'Stone... That Flows': Faience and Glass as Man-Made Stones in Egypt," *Journal of Glass Studies* 54 (2012): 15-16, 19. Barry, *Painting in Stone*, 7-8.

[159] *Ibid.*

[160] cf. Vase, lapis lazuli, Uruk (c. 3500 – 3100 BCE), Louvre, SB 18238: https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010189153; Vase, lapis lazuli, Bactria (c. 2100-1900 BCE), Louvre, AO 26477. https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cl010150881; Spouted bowl, lapis lazuli, Royal Cemetery of Ur, Penn Museum, B17167. https://www.penn.museum/collections/object/9490;

larger golden orbs that seemingly emit smaller particles of yellow light in the night sky. The depth of the ribbed surface also stretches many of the colorful patterns, producing yellow orbs followed by light blue streaks of astral-like "hair." In another method, that of gold-band cast glass, the artist would take a variety of gem-like colored canes of glass and strips of gold leaf and amalgamate them into a single whole **[Figure 1.18**]. In appearance, it produced a "super-gem" with all the *poikilia* of the Platonic heavens: a marbled blend of colors mimicking stones such as green emeralds, purple amethyst, and blue lapis lazuli. This marbled effect only served to enhance the imagined glitter of this piece. As has been well documented, in Latin, the noun *marmor* signified "marble," glittering "marble-dust," or "the bright level surface of the sea." It arose from the Greek verb *marmairo* (μαρμαίρω). The latter referred to a "flash, sparkle, gleam, of any darting, quivering light," whether it referred to reflective stones, the glint of light upon the waves of the sea, or the sparkling chorus of the stars. The mixture of scintillating golden inclusions with darker colors (blue, green) likely would have enhanced the associations with the starry heavens. Like the gods, the owners of such perfume vessels could seemingly reach out and "touch the stars" and even waft in the fragrance of the aethereal heavens.

In the first century, Pliny described another "astral" stone, which he called "sand-astros." "Its chief merit is that its fiery brilliance, displayed, as it were, in a transparent casing, glitters with golden particles that shine like stars within the stone, and always inside its structure and never upon its surface."[161] The starry particles (the modern term is "aventurescence") were the stone's most valued feature. "What is universally agreed," Pliny states, "is that, the larger the number of starry particles, the higher the price." Moreover,

[161] *Natural History* 37.100: "commendatio summa quod veluti in tralucido ignis optentus stellantibus fulget intus aureis guttis, semper in corpore, numquam in cute."

the galactic appearance of this stone was only enhanced because the metallic particles twinkled amid a "deep" or "dark" color (*austeritas*).[162] Scholars have posited that this stone might be plagioclase or aventurine.[163] However, such stones are not extant among Roman gems; moreover, they lack the transparent crystalline structure Pliny described.

Whatever the precise identification of this stone, or whether the stone is a fiction of an idealized heavenly gem, ancient glass workers, I argue, achieved this aesthetic ideal through gold-glass creations. We have already seen how artists integrated golden flecks within dark-colored glassworks as an abstract representation of starlight, but there were also figural representations. Gold glass is often termed "sandwiched-glass" because ancient artists would encase figures in gold leaf between layers of glass; the base (usually) being dark-blue while the top was transparent, as can be seen from the two gold-glass portraits from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, which scholars have argued were created in Alexandria, c. 200s – 300s **[Figures 1.27-28]**.[164] Using a fine point, artists have made the bodies of these ancient "stars" scintillate with golden light against a night-blue ground; their faces peer out from within a "transparent casing," just like Pliny's astral stone. We can rightly call these individuals "stars," as they seem to have had some renown in their social spheres: the fourth-century medallion of the woman and child is said to have

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[162] *Natural History* 37. 101-102:"inter omnes constat, quantum numero stellarum accedat, tantum et pretio accedere."

[163] Thoresen, "Archaeogemmology," 175, 179. George Rapp, *Archaeomineralogy* (Berlin: Springer, 2009), 92.

[164] Kurt Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), no. 264-265, 287–288; Helan C. Evans, Melanie Holcomb, and Robert Hallman, "The Arts of Byzantium," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 58 (2001): 9; Daniel Thomas Howells, Christopher Entwistle, and Liz James, *A Catalogue of the Late Antique Gold Glass in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 2015), 10 (n. 70), 42, 115–16, 147, pl. 23.

been found at Hadrian's Villa (c. 1700s), perhaps indicating a well-connected family around the time of the Villa's abandonment;[165] the other medallion was made for a certain Gennadios, the meaning of which is derived from *gennadas* (γεννάδας), meaning "noble, generous," just as *gennaios* (γενναῖος) also means "well-born, noble, generous."[166] Scholars have translated the inscription from an Alexandrian dialect as, "Gennadios, most skilled in music" (ΓΕΝΝΑΔΙ ΧΡΩΜΑΤΙ ΠΑΜΜΟΥΣΙ). Based on this translation, scholars have thought Gennadios might have been the victor of some musical competition.[167] Yet we can add more details to these assessments. Another translation of the inscription captures a witticism in Greek, "Gennadios, the all-musical, is the most chromatic."[168] According to Plutarch, "if one wishes to cultivate music nobly (also "beautifully," "καλῶς") and with discrimination, one should copy the ancient manner" and study philosophy from the time of one's youth. This ancient manner included the three main categorizations of ancient music: diatonic, enharmonic, and chromatic.[169] Plutarch then concludes his discourse *On Music* by stating that the true purpose of such music is not revelry but to produce a sacred art. Why? Because philosophers from time immemorial, he states, have shown that the circuits of the sacred stars move about under the influence of music; those heavenly harmonies through which the Creator framed the universe.[170] Yet,

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[165] Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality*, 288.

[166] "γεννάδας," "γενναῖος," *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*.

[167] On the basis of the inscription, the Met's website for the object (no. 26.258): "This exquisitely vivid image of an educated youth of the powerful port city of Alexandria probably celebrates his success in a musical contest."

[168] For "all-musical" see Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "πάμμουσος."

[169] *Moralia* (*On Music*) 32. Quoted portion: "Εἰ οὖν τις βούλεται μουσικῇ καλῶς καὶ Dκεκριμένως χρῆσθαι, τὸν ἀρχαῖον ἀπομιμείσθω τρόπον."

[170] *Moralia* (*On Music*) 44.

given the artist's painstaking efforts to create this medallion's visual program, Gennadios's chromatism might take on other valences. Indeed, the word *chroma* (χρῶμα) is primarily a visual term, meaning "skin, complexion," the color of yellow "turmeric" dyes, and in astronomy, the brilliant "complexion of heavenly bodies."[171] Lastly, as has been well documented, the vast majority of ancient gold-glass portraits were discovered in funerary settings, where viewers were often in a state of mind to imagine the deceased in the afterlife. The smooth edges of this medallion, moreover, indicate it may have been purposed-built for the tomb (as opposed to discs that were broken from drinking vessels and reused in funerary settings).[172] All taken together, as Roman subjects contemplated Gennadios's radiant golden skin amid a night-blue ground — which is itself conveyed the features of Pliny's idealized astral stone — they likely imagined the fate of this chromatic soul: Gennadios had excelled at music and philosophy, and now his soul dazzled amid the twinkling aether. Transformed from mortality to immortality, he had at last attained the true harmonies of heaven.

Descending Gods and Discerning Souls within Skin, or The Art of Animal Physiognomy

So far, we have seen how the soul might be represented as externalized in various transformation scenes: whether in the form of a butterfly, a woman with butterfly wings, or artistic materials that evoke the soul in the starry aether. Yet metamorphosis also involves transformations in which bodily appearance changes (e.g., into animals, plants, or

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[171] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, "χρῶμα."

[172] Thomas, Entwistle, and James, *Gold Glass in the British Museum*, 63-64; Susan Walker, "Gold-Glass in Late Antiquity," in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Art*, ed. Robin Margaret Jensen and Mark D. Ellison (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 124, 127-130.

new human forms), but the soul remains hidden. This occurs particularly during moments of "divine deception," when divinities descend from heaven to earth in order to test or seduce mortals. Could visual artists depict the soul even when it was secreted within the skin?

The question of identity is a frequent subject of literary and artistic studies of metamorphosis. As explained in the introduction, one of the major questions has been the quest to categorize the artistic conventions that would aid viewers in the identification of known myths of metamorphosis. Scholarly studies have also puzzled over the similarities and differences between hybridity and metamorphosis in literary sources and visual art and how these relate to questions of identity. [173] However, the dominant approaches have yet to wrestle with the question of how the metamorphic image could use the visible appearance of the body to depict the hidden and invisible soul. Indeed, such a representational ambition has been thought to be an impossibility for visual artists. As one author puts it, Ovid's poetry might easily portray Actaeon's inner psyche as his hounds attack him, but visual artworks could not simultaneously depict both the body and the inner soul since Actaeon "cannot be both invisible and seen." [174] In what follows, I will challenge this assessment and explore how the metamorphic image might envision the paradoxes of transformation: the depiction of visible skins yet hidden souls, and unchanging identity within a world of changing forms.

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[173] Alison Sharrock, "Representing Metamorphosis," in *Art and Text in Roman Culture*, ed. Jas Elsner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 103-30, esp. 105-108, 110, 112, 118, 129-130; Richard Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment: Greek Myths of Metamorfosis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 76-109, esp. 92, 98, 100, 107. Annetta Alexandridis, "Shifting Species. Animal and Human Bodies in Attic Vase Painting of the 6th and 5th Centuries B.C.," in *Bodies and Boundaries in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Thorsten Fögen and Mireille M. Lee (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 267-286, esp. 263, 268.

[174] Sharrock, "Representing Metamorphosis," 112.

In Greco-Roman antiquity, the practice of discerning souls from outward bodily tokens was known as physiognomy. Some of the earliest attempts at physiognomic inquiry were written by the anonymous followers of Aristotle. Debates ensued over whether the soul shaped the body or the body shaped the soul, while many adopted the intellectual middle ground: this meant that the body and soul existed in a sympathetic relationship, such that a change in bodily form reflected a change in the soul's affective state, and vice a versa. Such observations applied equally well to animals and human bodies.[175] Platonists largely accepted physiognomic principles while envisioning the moment when the preexistent soul chose to enter mortal flesh. As argued at length by George Boys-Stones, the shape of the body "mirrors the state of their soul at the time of incarnation."[176] Platonic tradition held that Pythagoras had determined the soulful character of his prospective pupils through physiognomy. Socrates followed suit by physiognomizing his young students, Plato and Alcibiades, before admitting them to study. For Platonists, the practice of physiognomy also revealed insights into the soulful proclivities of transmigrated bodies. In other words, the types of strengths and weaknesses, virtues, and vices that one held in a prior life influenced the type of animal body one inherited when one transmigrated into a new form.[177] Given the overall theoretical similarities between transmigration and metamorphosis (the soul migrates into a new bodily form, whether human or animal), it

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[175] Mariska Leunissen, "Physiognomy," in The Oxford Handbook of Science and Medicine in the Classical World, ed. Paul Keyser and John Scarborough (Oxford.: Oxford University Press, 2022), 745-746, 748.

[176] George Boys-Stones, "Physiognomy and Ancient Psychological Theory," in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain and George Boys-Stones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 63, 66, 124.

[177] Leunissen, "Physiognomy," 744, 753-755.

seems likely physiognomic principles also entered the metamorphic imagination. However, the relationship between metamorphosis and physiognomy has not yet been examined, much less in the visual arts.

At the moment, the dominant scholarly approach to physiognomy and the arts has been given an anthropocentric focus, though discussions of animals are replete in physiognomic treatises.[178] In fact, the practice of using physiognomy to choose candidates for philosophical schools was likely based on the widespread practice of discerning the soulful proclivities of animals.[179] In the peripatetic tradition, the theoretical basis of physiognomy emerged out of animal analyses. Pseudo-Aristotle (c. 3rd century BCE) thus writes that "experts on the animals are always able to judge of character by bodily form: it is thus that a horseman chooses his horse or a huntsman his hounds. If these things are true, and these things are always true, there can be physiognomy."[180] The practice continued well into Roman times. The Greek philosopher Polemon (c.90-144 CE) would write: "Some have practiced physiognomy on horses, sheep and goats, dogs and various types of beasts, and by physiognomizing them have attained knowledge of their secrets and

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[178] Hartsock focuses on physiognomic texts but suggests that images likely were also part of the physiognomic imagination of antiquity: Chad Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness in Luke-Acts: The Use of Physical Features in Characterization* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 12. Elsner does examine images but focuses entirely on human portraits:
Jas' Elsner, "Physiognomics: Art and Text," in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain and George Boys-Stones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 203-26, esp. 209-218.

[179] Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness*, 8.

[180] Swain, "Physiognomy Attributed to Aristotle," 639: "ἔτι δὲ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων οἱ περὶ ἕκαστον ἐπιστήμονες ἐκ τῆς ἰδέας δύνανται θεωρεῖν, ἱππικοί τε ἵππους καὶ κυνηγέται κύνας. εἰ δὲ ταῦτα ἀληθῆ εἴη (ἀεὶ δὲ ταῦτα ἀληθῆ ἐστίν), εἴη ἂν φυσιογνωμονεῖν." Commentary: Boys-Stones, "Physiognomy and Ancient Psychological Theory," 57. Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness*, 10.

information about them before the appearance of their actions."[181] In addition, one of the ways that physiognomists systematized their study was by analyzing an animal's unique bodily features and then pairing these with a characteristic attribute. Physiognomic signs from one species could then be extrapolated and applied to other species. For instance, a man with a lion-like look, such as Alexander the Great, revealed a soul endowed with the bravery of a lion.[182] As we will see shortly, images of metamorphosis often supplied human-like features to animal appearances to intimate an inner soul that was human or divine.

Numerous texts recount that the eyes were the most useful body part for discerning the soul of animals and humans. While the Epicurean Lucretius (c. 99- 55 BCE) resisted the idea that the eyes were "portals" to the soul, most other writers likened the eyes to windows, doors, or mirrors of the soul.[183] Cicero (106- 43 BCE) opines that the expressions of the face act as a mirror of the soul, especially the eyes that reflect inner feeling. "No other part of the body," writes Pliny (23/24 – 79 CE), "supplies greater indications of the mind (or "soul," "*animus*")—this is so with all animals alike, but specially with man in fact the eyes are the abode of the mind/soul (*oculis animus habitat*)."[184] Polemon (c.90-144 CE)

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[181] Though Polemon wrote in Greek his writings are preserved mostly in Arabic. Hartsock, *Sight and Blindness*, 16; see Arabic text and translation in Antonella Ghersetti, "The Istanbul Polemon," in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain and George Boys-Stones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 479.

[182] Boys-Stones, "Physiognomy and Ancient Psychological Theory," 67; Elsner, ", "Physiognomics," 212-15; Leunissen, "Physiognomy," 743-745, 747, 750.

[183] *De Rerum Natura* 3.359-69.

[184] Mariska Leunissen, "Physiognomy," in *Oxford Handbook of Science and Medicine in the Classical World*, ed. John Scarborough and Paul Turquand Keyser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 758. Cf. Ciceros's *Laws* 1.9. Pliny, *Natural History* 9.147-148: "neque ulla ex parte maiora animi indicia cunctis animalibus, sed homini maxime..."

for his part called the eyes gateways that reveal the hidden mysteries of consciousness.[185] Put more poetically, Philostratus Elder (c. 190 – c. 230 AD) writes to a lover, "Your eyes are more translucent than drinking cups, so that even your soul can be seen through them."[186] Whether the eyes were likened to glass cups, mirrors, or windows, they were imagined as the means through which an outside viewer might catch a vision of the soul within the body.

Initially, ancient literary descriptions of metamorphosis were anything but meditations on the inner psyche, but this trend would not last. As others have noted, ancient Greek transformation myths largely emphasized the suddenness of an astonishing change. With occasional exceptions (e.g., the poet Moschus, fl. 150 BCE), it was really with Ovid that metamorphic myths acquired a sustained psychological impulse.[187] By the second century, Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* would push these psychological dimensions of metamorphosis to their limits, making the inner psychological experience of the protagonist's ass-metamorphosis its central theme (not to mention preserving the story of cupid and psyche). Scholars have also noted that physiognomic inquiry plays a role in Apuleius' narrative, and some have even contended that Apuleius is the author of the physiognomic treatise *Anonymous Latinus* (though more recent scholarship finds this unconvincing).[188] Although many have noted Ovid's tendencies toward psychological

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[185] Preserved in Arabic: Robert Hoyland, "A New Edition and Translation of the Leiden Polemon," in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain and George Boys-Stones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 341; Leunissen, "Physiognomy," 751.

[186] *Letters* 32.1-2: "Τὰ μὲν ὄμματά σου διαυγέστερα τῶν ἐκπωμάτων, ὡς δύνασθαι δι᾽ αὐτῶν καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἰδεῖν…"

[187] Gildenhard and Zissos, "Introduction to Part I," 69-70; Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 6.

description, Ovid's representations of physiognomy remain overlooked. In the *Metamorphoses,* the wolf-transformation of Lycaon brings together multiple ideas we have been discussing in this chapter:

> The king himself flies in terror and, gaining the silent fields, howls aloud, attempting in vain to speak. His mouth of itself gathers foam, and with his accustomed greed for blood he turns against the sheep, delighting still in slaughter. His garments change to shaggy hair, his arms to legs. He turns into a wolf, and yet retains some traces (*vestigia*) of his former shape. There is the same grey hair, the same fierce face, the same gleaming eyes, the same picture (*imago*) of beastly savagery.[189]

In this passage, there are two main philosophical principles at work—motion and physiognomy. Although Jupiter's power is what brings about Lycaon's transformation into a wolf, the magic spark occurs when the king runs from his house. Motion seamlessly corresponds with mutation, as if Lycaon's movements through space seem to aid the process of his transformation. In Ovid's legend, Lycaon is portrayed as deceptive, intrepid, sacrilegious, cannibalistic, and despotic. Ancient physiognomic descriptions of wolf-like men likewise imagine a similar constellation of negative attributes, though there are differences as well. "You will find some people who have a similarity to predators and wild animals," writes Polemon. "The wolf is bold, treacherous, tyrannical, a thief, desirous, oppressive, deceitful, supportive of oppression, co-operative with companions."[190] *Anonymous Latinus* provides a description that is even more Ovidian:

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[188] Hugh J. Mason, "Physiognomy in Apuleius Metamorphoses 2.2," *Classical Philology* 79 (1984): 307-309. For the state of the field regarding the relationship between Anonymous Latinus and Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, see: Ian Repath, "Anonymous Latinus, Book of Physiognomy," in *Oxford Handbook of Science and Medicine in the Classical World*, ed. John Scarborough and Paul Turquand Keyser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 549.

[189] *Metamorphoses* 1.232-239: "territus ipse fugit nactusque silentia ruris exululat frustraque loqui conatur: ab ipso
colligit os rabiem solitaeque cupidine caedis vertitur in pecudes et nunc quoque sanguine gaudet. in villos abeunt vestes, in crura lacerti: fit lupus et veteris servat vestigia formae; canities eadem est, eadem violentia vultus,
idem oculi lucent, eadem feritatis imago est."

[190] Preserved in Arabic: Hoyland, "A New Edition and Translation," 385.

> The wolf is a rapacious, angry, insidious, daring, and violent animal. Men who are referred to this type of animal will be as follows: they will have a hooked nose, eyebrows which are hairy, joined and turned downwards, small, shut, hollow eyes, a small, round head, a hairy body, long hair, and legs which are drawn back and restricted. Men of this sort are clever, impious, rejoice in blood, are quick to anger and bad in character to such an extent that they do not accept what is given or offered and they steal what is not given.[191]

Like a mythological Lycaon, Polemon's wolf-man is bold, tyrannical, and deceitful, though he lacks the characteristic bloodlust. *Anonymous Latinus* does, however, describe the wolf-man's "impious" and bloodthirsty nature (he "rejoice[s] in blood," is "angry," "violent," etc.). This description is more detailed than Ovid's but nonetheless emphasizes that wolf-like men can be discerned by their eyes and hairy bodies. Yet Ovid does not supply the reader with the "clinical" symptoms of wolf-ness but provides a description that is as unsettling as it is soulful. Lycaon takes the outward shape of a wolf, but his soul has left bodily "*vestigia*" of his true identity, meaning "traces, marks, signs, tokens, or vestiges." The sum total of signs (the same "gleaming eyes," "fierce face," and "gray hair") create an "*imago*" of Lycaon's ever-wolf-like soul. Here the term "*imago*" is fitting as it not only refers to an "image" but could also mean a "phantom, ghost, or apparition."[192] It is an *imago* of the feral soul of a cannibalistic king shining through the gleaming eyes of a wolf.

Given the imagistic language of this account, one wonders if Roman subjects performed physiognomic readings on actual works of art. Here the question of discerning

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[191] Repath, "Anonymous Latinus," 632-33 (no. 126): "Lupus animal est rapax, iracundum, insidiosum, audax, violentum. qui ad huius animalis speciem referuntur homines, ita erunt: naribus obuncis, deorsum detractis superciliis coniunctis hispidis, oculis parvis clausis subcavis, capite parvo rotundo, hispido corpore, protensis capillis, reductis ac restrictis cruribus. huiusmodi homines callidi, impii, gaudentes sanguine, ad iracundiam faciles, moribus pravi usque adeo sunt, ut quod datur vel offertur non accipiant, quod non datur rapiant."

[192] Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "imago."

the soul within an image is related to the broader discourse concerning the animation or soulfulness of images in antiquity. Pliny, in his exposition on Roman paintings (and with not a little bias towards naturalism), lamented that a sluggardly attitude dominated the arts of his day. Painters had neglected the detailed representation of bodily features since they believed that soul (*anima*) could not be portrayed. In better days, he opines, the viewer could look at an image of an ancestor and discern that individual's character.[193] As he revels in the imagined glories of artistic yore, he cites the skill of the painter Aristides of Thebes (c. 4th century BCE), who "was the first of all painters who depicted the mind (*animus*) and expressed the feelings of a human being" (even if is choice of colors was too strident).[194] Yet his contemporary, Apelles (fl. 4th century BCE), may have outdone him:

> He [Apelles'] also painted portraits so absolutely lifelike that, incredible as it sounds, the grammarian Apio has left it on record that one of those persons called 'physiognomists,' (*metoposcopos*) who prophesy people's future by their countenance, pronounced from their portraits either the year of the subjects' deaths hereafter or the number of years they had already lived."[195]

Despite Pliny's description of a "physiognomist" (*metoscopos*), it has been argued that this passage does not evince a physiognomic approach to viewing paintings in antiquity. The rationale is that Pliny's description does not describe real art, but a mythical naturalistic ideal. Moreover, Apelles's paintings, it is said, did not reveal physiognomic insight into a subject's character but were used for prognosticating futures.[196] This

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[193] The diatribe is lengthy but the most relevant parts are found in: *Natural History* 35.2.6-7, 9-11.

[194] *Natural History* 35.98:"Aequalis eius fuit Aristides Thebanus. is omnium primus animum pinxit et sensus hominis expressit, quae vocant Graeci ἤθη, item perturbationes, durior paulo in coloribus."

[195]*Natural History* 35.89: "Imagines adeo similitudinis indiscretae pinxit, ut—incredibile dictu—Apio grammaticus scriptum reliquerit, quendam ex facie hominum divinantem, quos metoposcopos vocant, ex iis dixisse aut futurae mortis annos aut praeteritae vitae."

[196] Elsner, "Physiognomics," 203-204.

assessment, however, adopts an overly narrow understanding of physiognomy in antiquity. For ancient physiognomists like Polemon and Loxus, the practice of physiognomy also included the ability to divine from bodily signs an individual's past or future, a practice which they likely adopted from prior Mesopotamian physiognomic and divinatory practices.[197] Both Pliny and Ovid provide evidence that a physiognomic approach to viewing artworks had probably infiltrated the cultural mindset around the first century.

Images of Jupiter's disguised descents from heaven exemplify the artistic impulse to depict souls lurking within zoomorphic bodies. Consider, for instance, a fresco of Europa and the Bull from the "House of Jason" or the "House of Fatal Loves." Roman subjects would have seen this scene on room G's back (west) wall **[Figures 1.31, 33]**. Upon entering, the viewer would also see on the left (south) an image of Pan and nymphs playing music instruments (south), and on the right (north), the myth of the centaur Nessus's near abduction of Deianeira, Hercules's bride **[Figures 1.34-35]**. In the Europa scene, the rocky landscape dwarfs the mythological content, with the result that viewers would likely be drawn closer to identify the smaller-scale mythological figures. At close range, one notices Europa sitting on the bull's back **[Figure 1.31-32]**. Her languid carefree demeanor matches the attitude of two of her attendants but contrasts with the woman nearest to the bull: Europa's handmaiden grasps Jupiter's head and peers deeply into his eyes as if searching for a soul hidden beneath animal hide. Jupiter's stare, a

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[197] Simon Swain, "Introduction," and Repath, "Anonymous Latinus," in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul: Polemon's Physiognomy from Classical Antiquity to Medieval Islam*, ed. Simon Swain and George Boys-Stones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 11-12, 635. Leunissen, "Physiognomy," 743, 751-52.

growing human-like eye, freezes as if this animal has been “spooked,” or rather caught by the knowing viewer, who discerns what physical eyes cannot see: the divine numen, which can only be fully represented in the viewer’s imagination. In describing the Europa myth, the poet Moschus (fl. 150 BCE) provides the earliest surviving literary description that explores the inner-hidden-deity inside the bull. He writes that Jupiter, "wishing to deceive the girl's simple mind, he hid his godhead, altered his shape, and became a bull." [198] Yet, from within this faux-animal, "his eyes shone brightly underneath [the skin] and shot forth desire like lightning." As the bull licked her neck and gazed into her eyes, he “enchanted the girl” ("κατέθελγε δὲ κούρην").[199] Europa then suggested to her companions that they ride the bull since his gaze revealed his tameness and human-like mind; for this bull is not "at all like other bulls, but a sensible mind like a man's surrounds him, and he lacks only speech."[200] As in Moschus’s description, the painter of room G did not explicitly depict Jupiter’s inner numen but used physiognomic cues that would have prompted viewers to imagine a divine presence within this bull’s painted skin.

This is not the place to analyze all the frescos in the House of Jason in detail. Still, it is worth noting that other scholars have drawn attention to the ways that many of the other mythological paintings were also designed to elicit imaginative responses from viewers. The paintings, for instance, do not show Medea butchering her children, nor

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[198] For Jupiter’s disguise see *Europa* 76-79: "δὴ γὰρ ἀλευόμενός τε χόλον ζηλήμονος Ἥρης παρθενικῆς τ’ ἐθέλων ἀταλὸν νόον ἐξαπατῆσαι κρύψε θεὸν καὶ τρέψε δέμας καὶ γείνετο ταῦρος." For lightning eyes inside the bull, see *Europa* 86: "ὅσσε δ’ ὑπογλαύσσεσκε καὶ ἵμερον ἀστράπτεσκεν."

[199] *Europa* 94.

[200] *Europa* 105-107: "...οὐδέ τι ταύροις ἄλλοισι προσέοικε, νόος δέ οἱ ἠύτε φωτός αἴσιμος ἀμφιθέει, μούνης δ’ ἐπιδεύεται αὐδῆς.”

does Phaedra's lust yet lead to Hippolytus's doom, nor is Helen yet seduced by Paris (thus leading to the bloodshed of the Trojan war). Instead, paint presents each of these women in the psychological moment of decision and amid scenery that anticipates future tragedies, which the viewers may imagine for as little or as long as suits their temperament.[201] Room G has been studied less thoroughly, but the painted subject matter invites the viewer to experience "*phantasia*" (φαντασία), the imaginative visualization in which rhetoricians reveled. Thus, the eyes see Deianeira holding a garment, while the nearby Cupid reveals that the cloth is actually Nessus's poisoned "love charm." The latter, of course, proleptically signals Hercules's impending demise and apotheosis, which the imagination is invited to contemplate. On the opposite wall (south), the eyes see Pan and the Nymphs playing musical instruments, the sounds of which cannot be represented with paint but are suggested to the mind's "ear" **[Figures 1.34-35]**. All taken together, the visual program in the House of Jason invites imaginative spectator responses, as well as explorations of the psychological dimensions of myth, whether they be the painted psychological struggles of mythological women or the viewer's imaginative musings about Hercules's gruesome death, strains of mythical music, or visions of a divine presence within animal skin.

In Greco-Roman antiquity, the tendency to physiognomize Jupiter's metamorphic body was not limited to the fresco in the House of Jason nor Moschus's poetry. Ovid's

[201] Bettina Bergmann, "The Pregnant Moment: Tragic Wives in the Roman Interior," in *Sexuality in Ancient Art: Near East, Egypt, Greece, and Italy*, ed. Natalie Boymel Kampel and Bettina Bergmann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 199-218; Michael Koortbojian, "Mimesis or Phantasia? Two Representational Modes in Roman Commemorative Art," *Classical Antiquity* 2 (2005): 285-86.

description of Jupiter's descent into the form of a bull provided another account that would obtain broad currency in the Roman world:

> …and [Jupiter] took upon him the form of a bull. In this form he mingled with the cattle, lowed like the rest, and wandered around, beautiful to behold, on the young grass. His color was white as the untrodden snow, which has not yet been melted by the rainy south-wind. The muscles stood rounded upon his neck, a long dewlap hung down in front; his horns were twisted, but perfect in shape as if carved by an artist's hand, cleaner and more clear than pearls. His brow and eyes would inspire no fear, and his whole expression was peaceful. Agenor's daughter [Europa] looked at him in wondering admiration, because he was so beautiful and friendly. But, although he seemed so gentle, she was afraid at first to touch him. Presently she drew near, and held out flowers to his snow-white lips.[202]

Ovid's description gradually betrays clues of this "bull's" Olympian origins through its behavior and bodily signs. At first, the bull behaves like a common animal among the herd. Then in the reader's imagination, he appears with extraordinary strength, a "snowy" coat of fur, and a set of pearly horns; the brightness of these materials alluding to the god's celestial origins while describing the bull as if he were a cult statue. Attracted to this unusual beast, Europa then physiognomizes the "brow and eyes," which fill her with wonder and a paradoxical blend of peace and fear. As she looks through the eyes of a bull to discern the bull's character, she finally determines that he is "friendly" and "gentle." Charmed by the look in this bull's eyes, "she drew near;" then the story concludes as she mounts his back, and the divine bull takes her over the waves.

It may be that Ovid's description owes a debt to actual works of art. A fragmentary marble sculpture of Europa and the Bull, dating to the first century BCE, provides an early example that prefigures Ovid's account as well as a scene from the House of Jason **[Figure 1.36]**. This bull's bust once pertains to a sculptural group, the pieces of which are mostly

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[202] *Metamorphoses* 2. 850-861: "induitur faciem tauri mixtusque iuvencis mugit et in teneris formosus obambulat herbis. quippe color nivis est, quam nec vestigia duri calcavere pedis nec solvit aquaticus auster. colla toris exstant, armis palearia pendent, cornua vara quidem, sed quae contendere possis facta manu, puraque magis perlucida gemma. nullae in fronte minae, nec formidabile lumen: pacem vultus habet. miratur Agenore nata, quod tam formosus, quod proelia nulla minetur; sed quamvis mitem metuit contingere primo, mox adit et flores ad candida porrigit ora."

still found in the British Museum. Originally the artist depicted the bull in the act of swimming, with his four legs propped up on a pair of dolphins. His head faced the viewer while Europa rode side-saddle on his back, and her gaze likely leveled with his own (her head is now missing).[203] Despite this bull's ostensible naturalism, its body betokens a form that is stranger than nature.

Consider the eyes. Unlike numerous Roman depictions of bulls (many sacrificial), this "bull's" eyes are not located on the sides of the skull (as they should be).[204] Instead, the brow has been narrowed, and the eyes brought forward to the front of the face, portraying a bull's visage with odd *human-like* forms. Here it should be recalled that in the physiognomic imagination, when facial features seemed to cross-species, such features acted as a special index of the inner spirit; that is, if the bodily features of an individual appeared like a certain animal (bird-man, wolf-man, etc.), the physiognomist might make judgments about the tendencies of that person's inner character.[205] In the case of the man-faced bull at the British Museum, its human-like eyes likely would have acted as a clue that prompted viewers to imagine the spirit of an Olympian deity within wild zoomorphic flesh.[206]

Close scrutiny of the eyes also reveals contrasting expressions. Both eyes glance to the side at Europa. Yet one eye is fierce and terrible (the brow being cut into angry furrows), while the other eye is relaxed and peaceful. Indeed, if the viewer adopts Europa's

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[203] A. H. Smith, *A Catalog of Sculpture in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, The British Museum* (London, 1904), 8.

[204] For example, in the Louvre see the following inventory numbers of sculptures and reliefs of bulls dating c. 100 BCE – 100 CE: Ma 1096, Ma 1097, Ma 975.1, Gy 2093. In the British Museum see: 1856, 1226.1730; 1805, 0703.307; 1865, 0103.1; 1969, 0306.34;1866, 0504.121; 1816,0610.121; 1864, 0220.3.

[205] Leunissen, "Physiognomy," 743-745, 747, 750.

[206] Repath, "Adamantius the Sophist," 517; Repath "Anonymous Latinus," 561.

perspective (as if riding the bull), this huge bull seems meek and almost bashful **[Figures 1.37-38]**. It is a paradoxical sentiment akin to the affective response that Ovid's divine bull elicited in Europa ("His brow and eyes would inspire no fear.... But, although he seemed so gentle, she was afraid at first to touch him").[207] The expression in the bull's eyes is as antimonious as the well-known painted vision of the polymorphic Christ from Sinai, with his expression of peaceful ire.

Now consider the bull's flesh and veins. Across the bull's body, his muscles bulge with "steroidal" strength, and veins protrude, making the marble seem like it has softened into real flesh **[Figures 1.38-39]**. The overall effect echoes the ideal statues Callistratus (c. 3rd or 4th century CE) envisioned later. It is now well established that rhetoricians used physiognomic techniques in their ekphrases.[208] Describing a statue of the Paean, Callistratus would write, "Matter though it is, it gives forth divine intelligence, and though it is the work of human hands, it succeeds in doing what handicrafts cannot accomplish, in that it begets in a marvelous way tokens of a soul."[209] Veins might also indicate such soulful tokens. As Callistratus refers to a veined statue of a satyr, "You could have seen the veins

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[207] See the prior reference to Ovid's description of the Europa myth in the block quote recently cited.

[208] "If Polemon's entire corpus had one serious reader in antiquity, that would surely be Philostratus, his third-century biographer": Elsner, "Physiognomics," 222. In a recent volume various authors (esp. (J. Cale Johnson, Alessandro Stavru, Laetitia Marcucci, Antti Lampinen) also establish the ongoing interrelationship between ekphrasis and physiognomics, especially from Aristotle to the Second Sophistic. Alessandro Stavru and J. Cale Johnson, *Visualizing the Invisible with the Human Body: Physiognomy and Ekphrasis in the Ancient World*, (Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar: De Gruyter, 2020), 1-10 (Introduction), 143-160 ("Pathos, Physiognomy and Ekphrasis from Aristotle to the Second Sophistic"), 183-202 ("Physiognomic Roots in the Rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian: The Application and Transformation of Traditional Physiognomics"), 227-270 (" Physiognomy, ekphrasis, and the 'ethnographicising' register in the second sophistic").

[209] *Descriptions* 10.27-30: "ὕλη μὲν οὖσα θεοειδὲς ἀναπέμπει νόημα, δημιούργημα δὲ χειρὸς τυγχάνουσα ἃ μὴ δημιουργίαις ἔξεστι πράττει τεκμήρια ψυχῆς ἀρρήτως ἀποτίκτουσα."

standing out as though they were filled with *pneuma*" (meaning, "spirit, breath).[210] In antiquity, it was natural to think of marble as having veining since the term "vein" (Greek "φλέψ," Latin "*vena*") applied equally to marbles, metals, wood, and physical bodies, marble being imagined as an organic entity. One could think of the veining of rocks, wood, and the like as indicating a natural proclivity, and, in like manner, an individual's "*vena*" could also refer to " a person's natural bent" or "disposition." [211] Such thinking was not merely a poetic fancy, however. Callistratus's belief that veining indicated a statue's soulful disposition likely relied on a physiognomic prehistory. Not only did ancient physiognomists discern the soul's character based on facial features, but the veins also were indicative of an inner spirit. In Loxus's (c. 323-50 BCE) estimation, although eyes were windows to the soul, the soul's actual locus was found intermingled in the blood pumped through bodily veins.[212] Through the single symptom of bulging veins, physiognomists diagnosed a constellation of potential meanings. Large veins usually diagnosed anger, but they could also reveal impetuousness, stupidity, clumsiness, insanity, or lustfulness. Meanwhile, the related flush of blood might also indicate bashfulness.[213] As viewers contemplated the statue of the Europa and the Bull myth, the semantics were likely weighted toward the deity's lustfulness, impetuousness, or the potential for divine wrath (or coyness). More broadly, for the physiognomic adept (and later poets), the imagery of

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[210] *Descriptions* 1.3: "Εἶδες ἂν ὑπανισταμένας καὶ φλέβας ὡς ἂν ἔκ τινος γεμιζομένας πνεύματος..."

[211] Barry, *Painting in Stone*, 3, 62. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "vena";

[212] See especially Boys-Stones, "Ancient Psychological Theory," 60-64; but also: Swain, "Introduction," 15; Repath, "Anonymous Latinus," 565; Leunissen, "Physiognomy," 754, 756.

[213] Primary sources and translations found in *Seeing the Face, Seeing the Soul*: Repath, "Anonymous Latinus," 591, 609, 627; Repath, "Adamantius the Sophist," 535; Hoyland, "The Leiden Polemon," 411, 429; Swain, "The Physiognomy Attributed to Aristotle," 637.

bulging blood vessels would be a visible token of the soul pumping just below the skin's surface.

One final theme about the metamorphic gaze is worth mentioning. When the disguised Jupiter descended from heaven to earth, he often magnetized his victims with the enchanting gaze described by Ovid and Moschus. In visual art, this largely overlooked motif is manifest in numerous representations of Jupiter's zoomorphic seductions of Europa, Leda, and Ganymede. In general, the surviving evidence indicates that this theme began in the Hellenistic era, and gradually increased in popularity until the Second Sophistic, becoming less popular during Late Antiquity. The motif appears on mirror covers, lamps, floor mosaics, statues, and reliefs.[214] The dwindling of depictions of the lover's enchanting gaze is likely not due exclusively to its pagan subject matter, since depictions of these myths continued well into the Middle Ages. Rather, such images tend to be some of the most erotic and soulful depictions of Jupiter's metamorphoses, two ideas that many early Christians would not have countenanced (as opposed to having an allegorical or decorative function). A case in point is a relief of Leda and the Swan (c. 1st -second centuries) from Knossos, and now found in the Archaeological Museum of Heraklion **[Figure 1.40-42]**. The swan's outward bodily tokens reveal that this is no ordinary animal. Its colossal scale and the excessive talons that sink into the skin of Leda's thigh, each indicate a numinous force that exceeds the bounds nature has set for such birds. Yet even if most of the swan's body were entirely obliterated by the gnawing tooth of time,

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[214] One of the earlier depictions of the motif a zoomorphic Zeus/Jupiter soulfully locking eyes with his lover can be seen in: Buxton, "*Forms of Astonishment*," fig. 16 (c. 360-350 BCE. For others see: s.v. "Europe," "Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae," nos. 125, 155, 166; s.v. "Ganymedes," *LIMC* nos. 4 (?), 22, 107, 109, 110, 119 (?), 122, 124-5, 130-31, 137, 179-82, 188, 195-199, 226, 231, 247, 253; "Leda," 4, 16, 19, 22, 26-7, 63-4, 92, 96, 105, 115, 126,130, 133.

the physiognomic adept would likely still perceive an animating force. Such is the case with a high relief at the Palatine Museum **[Figures 1.43]**. All that remains of Jupiter's avian form is a talon, its rapacious nails still hooked into Leda's flesh. In the physiognomic imagination nails that were long and curved revealed a "beastlike man," (θηριώδης) while those "which are very crooked (σκολιός) [pertained] to a shameless and rapacious (ἅρπαξ) man." Here the term *skolios* (σκολιός), meant "curved, bent" but was also imagined metaphorically as behavior that was "crooked" or "unjust." The term "*harpax*" (ἅρπαξ) also had a wide range of apt valences such as "robbing, rapacious," or when used substantively, meaning "rapine" or even a "flesh-hook" (cf. ἅρπαγος "hook").[215] In the relief from Knossos, Cupid's tiny nudge contrasts with the avian behemoth before him, and yet it is clear that the boy god's spells dominate all the rest: Jupiter's hypnotic eyes lock onto Leda's, his gaze infiltrating her soul **[Figure 1.41]**. Leda's body doubles over, and her head falls backward, leaving the gaze looking upward (rather than directly at the swan). As recounted by *Anonymous Latinus*, "Eyes turned upwards reveal insanity, but also show that a man is greedy and devoted to sex and wine." And those that "keep their gaze fixed are claimants to beauty but confess that they are both philanderers and adulterers." [216] Similarly, for Adamantius the Sophist the tokens of insanity included parted lips, fixed eyes, the neck falling back, and general convulsive motions. In ancient rhetoric, moreover, the boundary between insanity, lovesickness, and divine power was often porous.[217] In true

[215] Repath, "Adamanatius the Sophist," 519: "ὁι δὲ σκολιοὶ σφοδρα ἀναιδοῦς, ἅρπαγος," Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "ἅρπαξ," "ἅρπαγος," "σκολιός."

[216] Repath, "Anonymous Latinus," 575 (para. 29): "oculi ad superiorem partem conversi insaniam declarant, sed et voracem venerique ac vino deditum ostendunt."; 584-585 (para. 42): "...et aciem dirigunt, affectatores pulchritudinis sunt, sed <et> moechos et adulteros se profitentur."

[217] Maria Gerolemou, "Representing the Insane," in Visualizing the Invisible with the Human Body: Physiognomy and Ekphrasis in the Ancient World, eds. J. Cale Johnson, Alessandro Stavru

physiognomic fashion, the gaze of these two lovers mirrors the state of their souls; the adulterous god's passion has pierced Leda's soul, leaving her mind frenzied with Love's madness. In the end, not only does the physiognomic zeitgeist call for "close looking," but imaginative "deep looking" into the soulful interior of artistic bodies.

Conclusion

During Greco-Roman antiquity there existed a widespread belief (among Platonists, Aristotelians, Stoics, and Epicureans) that motion and transformation were synonymous principles. Greco-Roman subjects imagined that all the matter in the cosmos was constantly transforming, as the four elements ascended or descended in cyclical patterns. Above the four elements there existed the aether, a starry fifth element. Authors from Aristotle to Alexander Polyhistor and Cicero described it as a divine element that animated the soul's life force. Within the cosmos, movements of ascension (or "levity") refined material substance, while descension (or "gravity") resulted in increasingly weighty and condensed formulations (ascension changes earth into water, then air, then fire, while descension does the opposite). For Plato all this cosmic motion led to changes in the bodies that inhabited the earth; and Epictetus went so far as to say that such cosmic movements not only accounted for the transformations of mortal bodies but also the changes of the gods. Natural philosophy thus sought to understand the changes of bodies and the natural world without recourse to miraculous tales.

Other philosophers, through the practice of physiognomy, sought to understand how an individual's soulful identity or personality might be discerned beneath the flesh. Starting in the third century BCE with the writings of Pseudo-Aristotle and continuing

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(Erscheinungsort nicht ermittelbar: De Gruyter, 2020), 271-282, esp. 271-272 (plus note 7), 273, 277-278 279.

beyond Polemon's writings during the second century CE (indeed well into Islamic times), physiognomic inquiry was applied to understand the soulful proclivities of animals and humans. Physiognomists scrutinized outward bodily tokens, such as facial features, nails, blood vessels, and the eyes, as reflections of the soul's inner workings.

For poets and artists, the physiognomic imagination was not just about choosing the best horse, hound, or candidate for philosophical study. Nor was physiognomy characterized only as a rationally ordered system for understanding the mind's workings. Instead, the poetry of Moschus and Ovid employs physiognomic language to portray, for instance, what it might be like to sense the soul of a tyrannical man behind the gleaming eyes of a wolf or to be enchanted by the strange gaze of a divine bull. From the middle of the Hellenistic era to at least the second century CE, one finds metamorphic images (e.g., Europa and the Bull, Leda and the Swan) that likely prompted viewers to physiognomize animal forms to imagine the god within. Facial expressions, musculature, bulging veins, or rapacious talons signified a terrible force that exceeded earthly bounds. Such artistic and poetic representations re-enchanted the philosophy of physiognomy. They existed as a cultural counterforce to the rationalisms prominent in Classical Greece and the Roman empire during the Second Sophistic (discussed in detail in chapter two).

During Greco-Roman antiquity, poetry would also draw upon philosophical worldviews regarding the body, the soul, and cosmic change. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* situates myth within an environment of cosmic change, as deities descended from heaven to earth, and mortals ascended into the aether and became divine. Ovid's literary representations are neither apologetic defenses of traditional myths nor disenchantments of the miraculous. Paradoxically, Ovid makes supernatural phenomena appear natural, and

the natural world seems wondrous and strange. Natural philosophy enhances the realism of mythical change, and mysterious supernatural forces re-enchant the natural world.

In the Roman imagination, aetherial ascents to the stars and divinization were not limited to the emperor. Just before the middle of the first century, divine honors were extended to members of the imperial family, including women (e.g., Drusilla, Caligula). In the *Dream of Scipio*, Cicero (106 – 43 BCE) represented a democratized view of the afterlife, in which the souls of the noble dead took flight and reached the Milky Way, where the soul explored cosmic mysteries alongside deceased family relations.

I have argued that artists represented apotheosis not only through iconographic means (e.g., riding a heavenly chariot, placing a bust amid the zodiac) but through the materiality of glyptics. Across Greco-Roman antiquity, there was a broad cultural zeitgeist that specific stones contained starry particles that had fallen from heaven. The poets Lucretius and Ovid, for example, both imagined that traces of the aether had been mixed in the earth in the primordial past. Others perceived the starlike qualities in specific stones. The epigrammatic poet Posidippus (c. 310 – c. 240 BCE) described the appearance of lapis lazuli as starlike since its night-blue ground twinkled with flecks of golden pyrite. Likewise, Pliny the Elder (23 – 79 CE) described the mysterious "sand-astros," which glittered with aventurescence upon a dark-colored ground. Yet other stones were imagined to have "a blazing star inside them;" that is, when human hands held them up to sunlight or firelight, they manifested a blazing or sparkling appearance (so recounts Pliny via Archelaus' [fl. 5th century BCE]). We have seen how artists used similar stones to depict deified souls. Especially during the first and second centuries, artists carved into semi-precious stones portraits of elite men and women, whose forms mimicked the likenesses of

Olympian deities such as Jupiter, Juno, and Diana. Sardonyx was an ideal medium for representing starry matter: its milky whites and fiery hues contrasted with yet other night-dark hues and thus displayed affinities with the aesthetic qualities and cultural imagination of the Milky Way. When such stones were exposed to transmitted light, moreover, they would have envisioned a blazing comet-like appearance. Often artists carved women's hair into the "fiery" part of the stone, thus mimicking Hersilia's prototypical coiffeur that blazed with a meteoric glow. From the Hellenistic era until roughly the third century CE, artists also carved the likenesses of important individuals into astral-looking stones like lapis lazuli and sapphires spangled with blue and yellow particles. During Late Antiquity, it was only natural for glassworkers to desire to simulate the appearance of these astral stones that had come down to earth. I have thus argued that the "stars" of ancient society (like the musically talented Gennadios) sometimes had their visages set in gold glass, where their golden skin would twinkle amid a night-dark ground. Many gold-glass portraits, moreover, have been discovered in funerary settings; an ideal location for the living to imagine that the souls of the deceased had ascended to the stars as in the *Dream of Scipio*.

In the Greco-Roman world, when depictions of deification were wrought in semi-precious stones (or gold-glass), they were not simply coded to a stock set of visual scenes, which spectators contemplated with calm and rational heads. While some of these images certainly had propagandistic purposes and iconographic meanings, these small stones also envisioned something more wondrous and paradoxical. Viewers held in their hands starry matter that had seemingly fallen to earth. Within this medium, they contemplated souls twinkling in the celestial aether. Other times, they glimpsed souls that flashed forth the

meteoric glow of apotheosis. Cosmic power had condensed into tiny stones, as souls were seen in matter, and mortals became gods.

CHAPTER 2

RATIONALISM AND THE METAMORPHIC IMAGINATION

In recent years textual scholars have drawn attention to rationalistic impulses in Greco-Roman culture toward myth. Natural philosophers and historians from Classical Greece until the Second Sophistic (c. 54- 230 CE) did not always find the miraculous aspects of myth plausible, including the strange way metamorphosis caused bodies to cross-species.[218] In brief, while most natural philosophers usually did not deny the existence of the divine outright, they nonetheless sought to explain the natural world without recourse to supernatural wonders. As Edward Grant has written, "...not only did the pre-Socratics eliminate the gods as the causes of natural phenomena and replace them with natural causes, but they also adopted a number of different approaches to explain the apparent diversity and change they observed in the world around them."[219] Historians and mythographers provided yet another approach. Euhemerus (c. late fourth century BCE), for example, rationalized the Olympian deities, positing that they were once mortals who performed benefactions and subsequently were imagined to be gods. Others, such as Palaphaetus (4th century BCE) and Heraclitus (1st or 2nd CE), specifically sought to

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[218] The most focused study on rationalism and metamorphosis are those by Gildenhard, Zissos, and Buxton: Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos, "Introduction to Part I," in *Transformative Change in Western Thought: A History of Metamorphosis from Homer to Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2017), 58-65; Richard Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment: Greek Myths of Metamorphosis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 231-247. Cf. P. M. C Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1-2; Karen S. Myers, *Ovid's Causes: Cosmogony and Aetiology in the Metamorphoses*, 4th ed. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1997), 134-35, 143-144, 157-160. For the broader question of the relationship between rationalism and myth, see: Jan N. Bremmer, "Myth, Mythology, and Mythography," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies*, ed. George Boys-Stones, Barbara Graziosi, and Phiroze Vasunia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 684-685; Greta Hawes, *Rationalizing Myth in Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 4, 18, 51.

[219] Edward Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy: From the Ancient World to the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8.

"cure" myths of their "*Unbelievable Tales*," such as those that concerned metamorphosis or hybrids. According to Jacob Stern (and subsequent scholarship is in accord), such texts were widely circulated among students as mythological "handbooks" during the Second Sophistic. [220] Further descriptions of Greco-Roman rationalism and its relationship to metamorphosis will be explicated in greater detail shortly.

For now, it prompts the central question of this chapter: Did Greco-Roman images ever betray similar rationalizing tendencies? To date, this question has been largely overlooked (except for a brief analysis that some Greek art depicts Actaeon wearing a deerskin rather than transforming into a stag).[221] In this chapter, I argue that some images of metamorphosis betray a growing spirit of rationalism, as images depict metamorphosis in ambiguous ways that allow for a plurality of interpretations, including the disenchantment of metamorphosis. Not every image of metamorphosis wholeheartedly embraced the wild zoomorphism of mythical traditions. Nevertheless, as Greta Hawes has persuasively shown, this does not mean that rationalists utterly rejected either myth or religion. Instead, in some cases, rationalists were re-writing, and I suggest,

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[220] For a diachronic study of Euhemerism in Greco-Roman antiquity, see: Marek Winiarczyk, *The Sacred History of Euhemerus of Messene*, trans. Witold Zbirohowski-Kościa (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 123-159. Cf. Truesdell S. Brown, "Euhemerus and the Historians," *The Harvard Theological Review* 39 (1946): 259-274, esp. 263. For Palaephatus and Heraclitus, see: Stephen Trzaskoma, "Mythography," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Second Sophistic*, ed. William A. Johnson and Daniel S. Richter (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 463-476, esp. 467-468; Jacob Stern and Palaephatus, *On Unbelievable Tales = Peri Apiston: with Notes and Greek Text from the 1902 B.G. Teubner Edition*, trans. Jacob Stern (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1996), 7-24; Jacob Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer: Περὶ Ἀπίστων, 'On Unbelievable Tales,'" *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 133 (2003): 51-97, esp. 51-72; Hawes, *Rationalizing Myth*, 37-118.

[221] Buxton briefly analyses the iconography of Actaeon wearing a deerskin Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 103. In my opinion, this counters Irving's assessment that the animal skins are just the standard convention for depicting transformation, as the latter author does not fully take into account rationalizing textual material: Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 199-200. The general assumption that rationalism was a text-only-enterprise is pronounced most flatly in one recent study on ancient atheism (without implying that all rationalists were atheists): "Atheist history is not embodied in buildings or rituals…": Tim Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2016), 7, 9.

re-creating images to represent more intellectually plausible versions of the mythical past. In some cases, I maintain that artists created rationalizations of metamorphic imagery not solely as an iconographic enterprise but as a perceptual strategy that emphasized the ambiguities of sight.

In what follows, I will first sketch some critical ways ancient philosophers and historians rationalized metamorphosis myths. Then I will turn to artistic case studies, which I suggest display a greater openness to rationalistic readings of metamorphic change.

Natural Change versus Miraculous Change in Natural Philosophy

The first ancient philosophers to wrestle with the problem of change were Heraclitus and Parmenides.[222] Each philosopher took an oppositional stance in a dialectical fashion, though we cannot be sure how much they may have known one another's writings. Long before Ovid's fictional 'Pythagoras' would describe the world as ever-flowing ("All things are in a state of flux, and everything is brought into being as a wavering image [*vagans imago*]),[223] Heraclitus (c. 535 – 475 BCE) was remembered to have coined the aphorism "*panta rei*" (πάντα ῥεῖ), meaning "everything flows." As specialists have noted, numerous authors from antiquity remembered Heraclitus as the first thinker to promulgate the idea that the entire perceptible world was constantly changing or flowing like a river: one could step into this river but never experience the same river twice. Bodies also could not extricate themselves from this cosmic torrent of

[222] Geoffrey Ernest Richard Lloyd, *Early Greek Science: Thales to Aristotle* (New York; London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), 36.

[223] My translation of *Metamorphoses* 15.178: "cuncta fluunt, omnisque vagans formatur imago."

change, and thus one could never truly encounter a person with the same physical form more than once.[224] Parmenides, by contrast, argued that change was non-existent, or at least that change was an illusion; that is, the senses discern changeability in the natural world, but sensory experience could be deceptive, and reason — the only means of ascertaining truth — could not positively prove the observed changeability.[225]

How the philosopher Empedocles (c. 490 – 430 BCE) responded to these debates — including his postulation of the four-element theory — would reshape how great minds approached the problem of change for over a millennium to come. For Empedocles, both sensory experience and rationality had limitations, which was precisely why both epistemological approaches were needed to understand the world. Equipped with sensory experience and rationality, Empedocles articulated his well-known theory of the four elements: the world was composed of some amalgamation of earth, air, fire, and water, each of which endlessly transmuted themselves into one another. Transmutation occurred through a process of motion: weightier elements (earth and water) were inclined to fall or press downward, while the lighter elements (air and fire) were inclined to take flight into the skies above. Day-to-day observations made this apparent (at least if one

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[224] Heraclitus, *Testimonia* D65-66 provides a number of citations regarding the flux-doctrine. For instance, per Socrates (fragment "C"): "Heraclitus says something like this: that all things flow and nothing remains; and comparing the things that are to the flowing of a river, he says that you could not step twice into the same river." ("λέγει που Ἡράκλειτος ὅτι πάντα χωρεῖ καὶ οὐδὲν μένει καὶ ποταμοῦ ῥοῇ ἀπεικάζων τὰ ὄντα λέγει ὡς δὶς ἐς τὸν αὐτὸν ποταμὸν οὐκ ἂν ἐμβαίης"). For further discussion and other iterations of this citation, see: Richard D. Mohr, "Image, Flux, and Space in Plato's 'Timaeus,'" *Phoenix* 34 (1980): 138; Lloyd, *Early Greek Science,* 36-37; Daniel W. Graham, "Heraclitus: Flux, Order, and Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy*, ed. Patricia Curd and Daniel W. Graham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 172-173; Daniel W. Graham, "Heraclitus," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, last modified 2021, accessed June 2, 2021, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heraclitus/.

[225] Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy*, 13; Lloyd, *Early Greek Science*, 38.

trusted the senses). [226] Fire could melt crystalline lumps of incense into a liquid pool, which in turn would smoke, evanesce, and rise into the air, leaving traces of its presence through its invisible smells. Conversely, the air above formed clouds that showered forth rain and dew; the resultant liquid, then, when exposed to cold would turn into ice as hard as stone. Fabio Barry's summation of this process of elemental change aptly captures its relevance to the metamorphic imagination:

> These metamorphoses of matter were ongoing, every substance in an open-ended state of transformation resulting from an efficient cause or awaited one. Any material, stones included, was therefore some compound of elements, or in a stage of transformation between them, and in the process of finding its proper place in the world.[227]

The Hippocratic school added other philosophical frameworks that would link the four elements to bodily health and medicine. Just as philosophers believed in the existence of four elements, they also posited four primary humors (phlegm, yellow bile, blood, and black bile), and as four associative qualities (dryness, moisture, coldness, or heat). It was thought that one's health, predilections for disease, and even the disposition of one's personality, were all influenced by the body's humoral composition and regulation. Many also envisioned the humoral theory through the earth's stones. Vitruvius, for instance, reasoned that the earth itself was a kind of body whose natural flows worked like bodily humors, just as Roman writers from Seneca to Ovid likened the "veins" of the earth (and its stones) to bodily "veins" that pumped blood. The earth formed its stones in various ways through hardening, moistening, firing, or freezing, leading to the kaleidoscopic

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[226] Lloyd, *Early Greek Science*, 39; Fabio Barry, *Painting in Stone: Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 49.

[227] Barry, *Painting in Stone*, 49.

variety of colorful stones upon the earth and their various gradations of obduration (which scientists now measure on the Mohs scale).[228]

During the fourth century, Aristotle's theories about transformation would add other details to the historical imagination of change that would prove influential for centuries to come. For Aristotle, questions relating to change and motion were at the core of what it meant to study the natural world. "Since Nature is the principle of movement (κινήσεως) and change," he writes, "and it is Nature that we are studying, we must understand what 'movement' (μεταβολῆς) is; for, if we do not know this, neither do we understand what Nature is."[229] Within the cosmos, change could occur in numerous ways. "So there are as many kinds of motion and change as there are categories of existence."[230] Nonetheless, Aristotle still sought to categorize some of the significant types of transformation observed in the world.

> The processes by which things come into existence in this absolute sense may be divided into (1) change of shape, as with the statue made of bronze, or (2) additions, as in things that grow, or (3) subtractions, as when a block of marble is chipped into a Hermes, or (4) combination, as in building a house, or (5) such modifications as affect the properties of the material itself.[231]

For Aristotle, the process of change and movement was often likened to artistic and architectural creations, which involve changes in substance, shape, and often change by

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[228] Lois N. Magner, *A History of the Life Sciences* (New York: Marcel Dekker, 2002), 25-27; Barry, *Painting in Stone*, 3, 61, 65.

[229] *Physics*, 1.200b 12-16: "Ἐπεὶ δ᾽ ἡ φύσις μὲν ἔστιν ἀρχὴ κινήσεως καὶ μεταβολῆς, ἡ δὲ μέθοδος ἡμῖν περὶ φύσεώς ἐστι, δεῖ μὴ λανθάνειν τί ἐστι κίνησις· ἀναγκαῖον γὰρ ἀγνοουμένης αὐτῆς ἀγνοεῖσθαι καὶ τὴν φύσιν."

[230] *Physics*, 3.1 201a 8-9: "ὥστε κινήσεως καὶ μεταβολῆς ἐστιν εἴδη τοσαῦτα ὅσα τοῦ ὄντος."

[231] *Physics*, 1.7.6-10: "γίγνεται δὲ τὰ γιγνόμενα ἁπλῶς τὰ μὲν μετασχηματίσει (οἷον ἀνδριὰς ἐκ χαλκοῦ), τὰ δὲ προσθέσει (οἷον τὰ αὐξανόμενα), τὰ δ᾽ ἀφαιρέσει (οἷον ἐκ τοῦ λίθου ὁ Ἑρμῆς), τὰ δὲ συνθέσει (οἷον οἰκία), τὰ δ᾽ ἀλλοιώσει (οἷον τὰ τρεπόμενα κατὰ τὴν ὕλην)."

addition and subtraction. In analyzing this passage, it is sometimes overlooked that references to art and architecture prevail in Aristotle's descriptions of natural change.[232] Yet besides transformations such as organic "additions" and material transmutation, Aristotle likens all other changes in the natural world to the processes of artistic and architectural creations. During Aristotle's era, his quest to understand the specific processes through which transformations occurred was not yet a key part of the literary imagination of metamorphosis, which, before Ovid, emphasized the suddenness of a single metamorphic act of change.[233]

Another indispensable feature of the Aristotelian imagination of change was the concept of polarity. From the Aristotelian perspective, change required a contrast between "two poles," from which movements or contrasts could be discerned.

> Now, motion and change cannot exist in themselves apart from what moves and changes. For, wherever anything changes, it always changes either from one thing to another, or from one magnitude to another, or from one quality to another, or from one place to another; but there is nothing that embraces all these kinds of change in common….Again, in each of these four cases, there are two poles between which the change moves; in substantive existence, for example, form and shortage from form; in quality, white and black; in quantity, the perfectly normal and an achievement short of perfection; and so, too, in the case of vection, up and down, or the action of levity and gravity. So there are as many kinds of change as there are categories of existence. [234]

Aristotle, then, imagined change as the movement from one point to another, whether these were contrasting colors or hues ("quality"), forms, or scale ("magnitude"). The concept of polarity also applied to Aristotle's understanding of cosmology and materiality

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[232] Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy*, 40.

[233] Gildenhard and Zissos, "Introduction to Part I," 69-70; Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 6.

[234] *Physics*, 3.1.200b 33-35, 201a 5-9: "Οὐκ ἔστι δέ τις κίνησις παρὰ τὰ πράγματα. μεταβάλλει γὰρ τὸ μεταβάλλον ἀεὶ ἢ κατ᾽ οὐσίαν ἢ κατὰ ποσὸν ἢ κατὰ ποιὸν ἢ κατὰ τόπον· κοινὸν δ᾽ ἐπὶ τούτων οὐδὲν ἔστι λαβεῖν….Ἕκαστον δὲ διχῶς ὑπάρχει πᾶσιν, οἷον τὸ τόδε (τὸ μὲν γὰρ μορφὴ αὐτοῦ, τὸ δὲ στέρησις), καὶ κατὰ τὸ ποιόν (τὸ μὲν γὰρ λευκὸν τὸ δὲ μέλαν), καὶ κατὰ τὸ ποσὸν τὸ μὲν τέλειον τὸ δ᾽ ἀτελές· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ κατὰ τὴν φορὰν τὸ μὲν ἄνω τὸ δὲ κάτω ἢ τὸ μὲν κοῦφον τὸ δὲ βαρύ. ὥστε κινήσεως καὶ μεταβολῆς ἐστιν εἴδη τοσαῦτα ὅσα τοῦ ὄντος."

that would influence later generations for centuries to come. In his view, the cosmos was a great eternal orb or sphere, which was divided by a lunar space into two antithetical realms, one celestial and the other terrestrial. The terrestrial region was composed of the four elements and was constantly changing. By contrast, the celestial realm was made up of a highly refined and immutable substance that was called the "aether." The incandescent aether was the stuff that made up the stars, planets, and the divine substance of the gods. It was also unchangeable, except for the changeability of place, a fact that was apparent from the movements of celestial phenomena (for more details regarding vection and the aether, see the sections in chapter one titled: "Cosmic Motion and Transmutation in the Metamorphoses" and "Metamorphic Ascents into the Aether, or How to Become a "Star" [c. 50 BCE – 300 CE]").[235] Aristotle's theory of the aether had incredible longevity and was still investigated by scientists up until Einstein.[236] Most importantly, any "vection," or upward or downward motion between the polarities of the terrestrial and celestial realms would accordingly result in transformation. As the four elements cycled upward and downwards in their natural motions, transformations would occur. The elements were often called *stoicheion*, meaning fundamental material elements that are indivisible, but Aristotle often uses the term *sōmata* or "bodies" interchangeably with *stoicheion*.[237] Without recourse to the gods and their metamorphic descents from heaven to earth, Aristotle, thus, provided an alternative way to imagine the

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[235] Grant, *A History of Natural Philosophy*, 37-38.

[236] Virendra Singh, "Einstein and the Quantum," *Current Science* 89 (2005): 2102.

[237] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 5.2.20. "fire, earth and all such bodies" ("τὸ πῦρ καὶ ἡ γῆ καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα τῶν σωμάτων"). Shortly afterwards Aristotle describes the "Element" (στοιχεῖον) in more detail: *Metaphysics* 5.3.

changeability of the terrestrial region as one of corporeal transformation. As other have noted, while Aristotle did not examine the topic of metamorphosis explicitly, his writings implicitly shifted away from mythic change, and sometimes even marginalized related concepts such as the zoomorphism or anthropomorphism of the gods.[238] In the centuries that followed, moreover, the philosophical relationship between motion and mutation between two points in space (as in "polarity" and "vection") were not without effect upon those who viewed works of art.

Plato (424/423 – 348/347 BCE) did offer an explicit rationalist critique of metamorphosis, while also positing a philosophical theory of change, which was partially inspired by Heraclitus and his follower Cratylus. According to Plato's theory of change, human and animal bodies were subject to continual rounds of change because they were composed of elemental substrates that themselves were incessantly transmuting from one element into another. For Plato there was no such thing as a void, and thus when the elements moved from one location to the next, some new material would of necessity replace the former, creating a transformation.[239]

The changeability of the world, however, did not make mythological metamorphosis likely. For the most part Plato's writings largely rejected the explanatory power of myth except when writing about the soul and the long distant primordial past.[240]

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[238] Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 235-36; Gildenhard and Zissos, "Introduction to Part I," 61; Bremmer, "Myth, Mythology, and Mythography" 684.

[239] Harold W. Miller, "The Flux of the Body in Plato's Timaeus," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 88 (1957): 106; Mohr, "Image, Flux, and Space," 138-139, 142.

[240] Bremmer, "Myth, Mythology, and Mythography," 684

In the *Republic* Socrates questions Adeimantus at length in order to lead him to the conclusion that poetic descriptions of metamorphosis are incompatible with deity:

> Do you think god is a wizard (γόης) and the sort who treacherously makes himself visible sometimes in one form, sometimes in another, and then again becoming himself, changing his appearance into many forms, then deceiving us and making us believe he has done so, or do you think he is straightforward and least of all one to step out of his own form? [241]

For Socrates tales of metamorphosis were troublesome because they were replete with divine deceptions and magic, making divinity seem like some sort of magician, a master of deception rather than truth. Adeimantus' initial response to such questions is one of shock, not knowing if it would be blasphemy to agree with this inquiry. Socrates, then, continues his argument, stating that since divinity cannot be lacking in any manner, any change or alteration would logically be a deviation from excellence. God, being an ideal being, would not even desire any change, as this too would be a deviance as well. "Then in this respect," Plato writes, "god would be least likely to have many forms (*morphas*)." The attributes of shapeshifters such as Thetis and Proteus and the other Olympians were untenable characteristics of divinity, and thus priests and mothers alike should cease from telling blasphemous tales about transformation.[242]

Up until this point, we have been discussing various ways that ancient philosophers provided alternate explanations for changeability in the natural world, while at times polemicizing metamorphosis. Yet philosophers were not the only ones to critique

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[241] *Republic* 380D: "ἆρα γόητα τὸν θεὸν οἴει εἶναι καὶ οἷον ἐξ ἐπιβουλῆς φαντάζεσθαι ἄλλοτε ἐν ἄλλαις ἰδέαις τοτὲ μὲν αὐτὸν γιγνόμενον, [καὶ] ἀλλάττοντα τὸ αὑτοῦ εἶδος εἰς πολλὰς μορφάς, τοτὲ δὲ ἡμᾶς ἀπατῶντα καὶ ποιοῦντα περὶ αὑτοῦ τοιαῦτα δοκεῖν, ἢ ἁπλοῦν τε εἶναι καὶ | πάντων ἥκιστα τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἰδέας ἐκβαίνειν;"

[242] *Republic*, 2.381b: "Ταύτῃ μὲν δὴ ἥκιστα ἂν πολλὰς μορφὰς ἴσχοι ὁ θεός." As a whole, Socrates's diatribe against divine deception and transformation can be found in *Republic*, 2.380d-383c. For commentary see: Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 235.

mythical metamorphosis. Historians and mythographers offered yet other ways to rationalize mythical change.

Historical and Mythographic Rationalism

In classical scholarship it is usually thought that myth in general had been the subject of skepticism by Greek scientists and historians since the rise of prose writing. Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 570-480 BCE) contended against anthropomorphism in religion, and posited that humankind had simply invented gods after their own image. If animals could create religious cults, the logic went, they too would create gods in their own image. One ultimately, then, could not ascertain the true form of divinity, since one's everyday experience determined the limit of what could be known. This broad epistemic framework, and concern with animality, would inform the approach of many historians and mythographers for centuries to come. One such historian and geographer was Hecataeus of Miletus (c. 560-480 BCE). The latter did not reject myth altogether, but would whittle away the fantastical aspects of myths, such as hybrids, until he reached a naturalistic core (e.g. Ceberus turns out to be merely serpent that was houndlike only in a metaphorical sense).[243]

The standard scholarly narrative about rationalism, as an intellectual movement, usually narrates the growth of rationalism from roughly the six century BCE to its culmination during the fourth century BCE with Palaephatus' *On Unbelievable Tales*. More recently, however, Greta Hawes has persuasively argued that the bulk of the available textual evidence survives from somewhat later eras. Instead, our most detailed

[243] Gildenhard and Zissos, "Introduction to Part I," 58-59; Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 232.

rationalizations of myth begin with Palaephatus (4th century BCE), and the textual evidence seems to peak during the second or third century CE. It was during this time that mythographic handbooks began to circulate in schools, including Heraclitus' (c. 200) own work that also bears the title, *On Unbelievable Tales*. The title thus evokes Palaphaetus' authority and general methodology, though Heraclitus' text is nonetheless largely its own unique production, and lacks some of the polemical edge of the latter author's work. [244]

Rationalist historians and mythographers did their deconstructive work largely in two ways. On the one hand, one could simply dismiss a myth as illogical, as Pliny the Elder did with wolf-transformations:

> We are bound to pronounce with confidence that the story of men being turned into wolves and restored to themselves again is false—or else we must believe all the tales that the experience of so many centuries has taught us to be fabulous; nevertheless, we will indicate the origin of the popular belief, which is so firmly rooted that it classes werewolves among persons under a curse.[245]

Here Pliny characterizes fables about werewolves and their shapeshifting bodies due to a type of gullible credence in the miraculous. Pliny's words reveal a societal split: while intellectuals tended to disregard mythical transformations, belief in metamorphosis was nonetheless "firmly rooted" among the "popular" masses. After this passage Pliny then ascribes the origin of werewolf-beliefs to various ancient Greek ritual and cultic practices of which he offers brief descriptions in a list, and then he quickly dismisses the tales as baseless ("It is astounding to what lengths Greek credulity will go; there is no lie so

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[244] Hawes, *Rationalizing Myth*, 6-7, 93; Jacob Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer: Περὶ Ἀπίστων, 'On Unbelievable Tales,'" *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 133 (2003): 56, 63, 72.

[245] *Natural History* 8.80-81: "homines in lupos verti rursusque restitui sibi falsum esse confidenter existimare debemus aut credere omnia quae fabulosa tot saeculis conperimus; unde tamen ista volgo infixa sit fama in tantum ut in maledictis versipelles habeat indicabitur."

shameless as to lack a supporter").[246] While Pliny's rationalization condemns miraculous transformation and itemizes tales in mythographic fashion, it does not provide alternative explanations for such tales. On the other hand, rationalist mythographers such as Palaephatus and Heraclitus did reconstitute myths to better fit rationalist sensibilities: first, their approach usually summarized the traditional version of the myth, then they criticized its miraculous or zoomorphic aspects (e.g. hybrids, species-crossing) and replaced these with alternative explanations that were derived from the world of quotidian experience. This approach has been characterized as a rhetorical exercise that identified "ambiguous situations or figurative language which might have been misconstrued at some point in the past," and then reinterpreted it.[247]

However, while such explanations account for the rhetoric of rationalization, they do not explain what caused myth to fall into error in the first place (at least in the minds of the historians). The answer to this inquiry, I suggest, is best explored through the phenomenology of misperception. Understanding how myths could arise from sensory errors, furthermore, will better help us understand how some artworks primed viewers minds to catch themselves in a moment of misperception.

Here the full title of Heraclitus' handbook is instructive: *On Unbelievable Tales: The Deconstruction or Curing of Traditional Myths in which Nature is Violated.* Its title suggests that the problem of myth is that it often violated the laws of the natural world.[248]

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[246] *Natural History*, 8.82: "mirum est quo procedat Graeca credulitas: nullum tam inpudens mendacium est ut teste careat."

[247] Hawes, *Rationalizing Myth*, 3.

[248] Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer," 62-64.

In the case of metamorphosis, it violated nature not only because it was miraculous, but because it fused the rational soul with non-rational nature (animals, plants, minerals etc.), or transgressed gender boundaries while maintaining anthropomorphism.[249] An overlooked aspect of mythographic rationalization is its polemic against instances of animality that did not accord with everyday experience. A long list of Heraclitus's rationalizations tend to replace strange instances of animality (metamorphosis, hybrids, bestiality, fire-breathing creatures etc.), with purely human actors.[250] Anthropocentrism, then, was a major feature of mythographic rationalization.

Here it should be noted that the terminology employed in Heraclitus' title could be applied to images as well as the care of the body. Jacob Stern uniquely supplies the translation "deconstruction" for the noun "ἀνασκευή." In argumentation the latter term usually meant a "reputation" or "denial," while ἀνασκευή might also mean its "remodeling" if applied to a work of art. As we shall see, artists sometimes took traditional representations of myth, and "remodeled" them so that they could be reimagined for rationalist ends. Alternatively, when ἀνασκευή was applied to the healing of the human body it could also signify the body's "reconstitution." [251] Naturally the therapeutic "curing" (θεραπεία) of myth evoked medical valences as well. Jacob Stern

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[249] Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 243. Hawes, *Rationalizing Myth*, 201-205. For how rationalism has influenced the scholarship of metamorphosis, see: P. M. C Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 1-3.

[250] Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer," nos. 1 (Medusa), 2 (Skylla), 3 (Caeneus), 5 (centaurs), 6 (Teiresias), 7 (Pasiphae), 8 (Harpies), 9 (Perseus's winged sandals), 12 (Atlanta and Hippomenes), 14 (Sirens), 15 (Chimaera), 16 (Circe's swine), 17 (fire-breathing bulls), 18 (Hydra), 19 (Spartoi), 20 (Dragon), 23 (Orpheus influence on animals), 24 (Golden fleece), 25 (Satyrs), 28 (Ganymede myth), 29 (Proteus), 30 (animal petrification), 31 (the mares of Diomedes), 33 (Cerberus), 34 (Lamia's metamorphosis), 35 (bird-metamorphoses).

[251] See "ἀνασκευή" in Franco Montanari et al., *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

has uncovered a wide range of rationalist sources which also sought to therapeutically "cure" the fantastical elements of myth, an approach which he finds is often implicated with stoic philosophy.[252] Yet what has so far been overlooked in such scholarship is that the rationalistic convalescence of myth, often sought to heal myths as if they were remedying some infirmity of the human senses. Heraclitus thus ascribes the mythical origins of centaurs to the ambiguities that arise when people view objects a distance, or when eyewitnesses thought they saw horse-men on the horizon, but actually were looking at men who were riding horses.[253] In like manner, Heraclitus accredits the metamorphoses of Atlanta and Hippomenes' into lions, to an optical misperception. He tells us that the real story is that the two protagonists went into a cave and were eaten by lions. When two lions eventually emerged from the cave, the eyewitnesses assumed that Atlanta and Hippomenes had miraculously been turned into lions.[254] The eyewitnesses, then, had seen correctly, but misinterpreted their sensory stimuli. Many of the tales also involve a misperception of hearing. Often a myth is introduced with the phrase "it is said," then we learn that the tale was actually misheard by someone, and that this error was then passed down through the ages (like the modern "telephone game"). In the Medusa myth, any "man who saw her was amazed — turned to stone, so to speak. We ourselves say, "he saw her and was turned to stone."[255] Palaphaetus used a similar strategy to rationalize away the myth of Niobe. In the "true" story, Niobe did not turn to

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[252] Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer," 62-64.

[253] Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer," 75.

[254] Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer," 78-79.

[255] Stern, "Heraclitus the Paradoxographer," 73. For the phrase "it is said" see myths nos. 3, 5, 21, 23, 27-29, 38.

stone, but rather someone made a stone statue of her. Afterwards those who saw the image would say: "A stone Niobe is standing on the tomb. We saw her ourselves."[256] Many more examples could be cited, but it suffices to say that mythographers like Palaephatus and Heraclitus often imputed the miraculous aspects of mythical aetiologies to the misperceptions that arise from ambiguities. The efforts of such rationalizations were often not an attempt to deny that the gods existed, but alternative voices within the tradition of mythological authorship. As Hawes has put it so well, historical rationalism represents, "…the desire to tell myths *properly*. It does not signal the death of myth or the corruption of ancient storytelling traditions. It is not antithetical to the authenticity and purity of Greek myth. It is myth." [257]

Leda and the Swan: Unseeing the Miraculous

Around the same time that Heraclitus' *On Unbelievable Tales* was making its rounds in Roman schools, a particular sculptural representation of Leda and the Swan seems to have found widespread acclaim **[Figures 2.2-4]**. Traditionally, the statue has been credited to the ancient Greek sculptor Timotheos. [258] However, there is very little support for this conclusion. What is more certain is the fact that over twenty-four

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[256] Stern, *On Unbelievable Tales*, 40.

[257] Hawes, *Rationalizing Myth*, 225.

[258] Barbara Schlörb, "Timotheos," Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archaeologischen Instituts 22 (1965): 51, figs. 15, 17. Recent scholarship has called into question the attribution of Leda and the Swan to Timotheos, as it rested only on uncertain visual parallels with the east pediment of the Temple of Asklepios at Epidauros. William A. P Childs, *Greek Art and Aesthetics in the Fourth Century BC* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2018), 215.

iterations of this statue have been found during Roman times, indicating its popularity for Roman audiences. [259]

In the Roman world spectators did not interpret images with a monolithic set of meanings. Instead, this statue of Leda and the Swan was probably viewed and discussed in a variety of meaningful ways. Many spectators likely interpreted it as a traditional representation of Leda and the Swan. However, I suggest that this statue displayed certain ambiguities that also allowed rationalist spectators to reinterpret and disenchant this myth.

In Greco-Roman antiquity, various authors resisted the miraculous aspects of the myth of Leda and the Swan. Consider, for instance, the way Euripides (c. 480 – c. 406 BCE) has Helen describe her own genealogy: "Tyndareus is my father (though there is a story that Zeus flew to my mother Leda in the shape of a swan [who was fleeing from an eagle and had his way with her by treachery, if that story is reliable])."[260] Helen's language is more forceful elsewhere: "No woman, either Greek or barbarian, ever gave birth to a white-shelled bird's egg, yet it was in this, men say, that Leda bore me to Zeus.

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[259] The sheer number of copies of the so-called "Timotheos-Leda" are described in: Kenneth Lapatin and Karol Wight, eds., *The J. Paul Getty Museum Handbook of the Antiquities Collection*, (Los Angeles, Calif.: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2010), 151. For the restoration of the Getty-Leda see: Maree Clegg, "Eighteenth-Century Restoration of Ancient Sculptures: Questions of Authenticity in the Collection of Charles Townley" (PhD diss., University of Auckland, 2020), 128-30, 189-190, figs. 202, 204, 281-84. For visual comparisons see: *LIMC* s.v. "Leda" nos. 5-6 (a-b,d), 7, 73 (b-d, g-i). Some of the better preserved (or restored) copies of the Leda sculpture are found in the Yale University Art Gallery (inv. no. 1986.1.1), the Capitoline Museums (inv. no. MC0302), and the Prado Museum (inv. no. E000009):
https://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/7221
http://www.museicapitolini.org/en/percorsi/percorsi_per_sale/palazzo_nuovo/galleria/statua_di_leda_con_il_cigno
https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/leda/2b45e725-8a41-45dc-a03e-9f1ec16128a2?searchid=329bacc5-a0ed-1250-481d-75a486189d99

[260] *Helen* 17-21: "πατὴρ δὲ Τυνδάρεως (ἔστιν δὲ δὴ λόγος τις ὡς Ζεὺς μητέρ᾽ ἔπτατ᾽ εἰς ἐμὴν Λήδαν κύκνου μορφώματ᾽ ὄρνιθος λαβών [ὃς δόλιον εὐνὴν ἐξέπραξ᾽ ὑπ᾽ αἰετοῦ δίωγμα φεύγων, εἰ σαφὴς οὗτος λόγος])..."

Did my mother bear me as a monstrosity in men's eyes?"[261] In both passages, Euripides invites the imagination to contemplate a double-perspective of the myth: recalling the traditional version of the tale, while also prompting skepticism about the monstrous and miraculous aspects of the myth of Leda and the Swan; that is, those strange instances of animality that violate the natural order by crossing species-boundaries, such as when a god takes animal flesh, or a woman gives birth to a swan's egg that produces a human child. But what could explain the representation of a swan? Philostratus (c. 170 – 247/250 CE) provides one rationalist explanation. In a letter to a would-be lover, he writes: "Danaë would accept gold, Leda birds, Europa the pick of a herd, Antiopê the creatures of the hills, Amymonê the creatures of the sea; but the poets made stories out of the gifts, perverting the truth by the charm of their fabrications."[262] This rationalist reading posits that poets fabricated Jupiter's various metamorphoses (into a bull, swan, gold, a satyr, etc.). The "truth" behind such stories is that the metamorphic forms described in myth were actually gifts (animals or objects), which lovers gave to Leda, Europa, or other women that Jupiter supposedly seduced.

Did any images of Leda and the Swan depict the scene so that the "swan" might be read as merely a common animal, or an object instead of a god in animal form? The representation of Leda and the Swan at the Getty and at Yale (the so-called Timotheos

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[261] *Helen* 257-260: "φίλαι γυναῖκες, τίνι πότμῳ συνεζύγην; γυνὴ γὰρ οὔθ᾽ Ἑλληνὶς οὔτε βάρβαρος τεῦχος νεοσσῶν λευκὸν ἐκλοχεύεται, ἐν ᾧ με Λήδαν φασὶν ἐκ Διὸς τεκεῖν. ἆρ᾽ ἡ τεκοῦσά μ᾽ ἔτεκεν ἀνθρώποις τέρας;" For commentary see: Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 16. It was also taboo for metamorphosis to occur on stage: Gildenhard and Zissos, "Introduction to Part I," 45-47.

[262] *Letters* 35: "Η Δανάη χρυσὸν ἐλάμβανεν, ἡ Λήδα ὄρνιθας, ἡ Εὐρώπη τὰ ἐξ ἀγέλης, ἡ Ἀντιόπη ὅσα ὄρεια, ἡ Ἀμυμώνη ὅσα θαλάττια 3· οἱ δὲ ποιηταὶ τὰ δῶρα μύθους ἐποίησαν παράγοντες τὴν ἀλήθειαν ψυχαγωγίᾳ 4 ψευσμάτων."

type) is antithetical to some of the most wildly supernatural (and erotic) depictions of this myth **[Figures 1.40-43, 2.1]**. The tokens of divine power are conspicuously absent: the swan does not appear with an impossibly colossal body, nor does it seize Leda's flesh with rapacious talons. Its wings are not outspread like most depictions of this scene, and one wonders if the serpentine necks, which shattered in antiquity, have been made overly "goose-like" by modern restorers. Some restoration efforts make the necks nearly serpentine, whereas others make them almost straight.[263] Whatever the "original" neck might have looked like, this "swan's" rapaciousness may be under question. Leda's eyes are not seized by the spell of some strange zoomorphic gaze, nor does the "swan" overwhelm the woman with an eager assault up her waist. In short, there is no overwhelming divine force; Leda is in control. Do we really know for certain that Leda interacts with a god in the guise of an animal, or might Leda actually be holding just a swan that was given her as a gift? Unlike many depictions of this myth, which make the swan's awe-striking presence of divinity clear, this representation displays sufficient ambiguities as to make the Philostratian rationalization possible for some viewers.

Yet another rationalist interpretation of this scene may have also been possible. Consider again the sculpture of the Leda myth. Leda pays no attention to the "swan" but looks away at some other matter that has caught her concern.[264] Then with equal

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[263] The swan's neck at Musei Capitolini essentially has a straight neck and looks the most like a water vessel, whereas the most twisty swan necks are those at the Getty and the Museo del Prado. Musei Capitolini: Statue of Leda with the Swan, marble, Roman sculpture, inv.MC0302:http://www.museicapitolini.org/en/percorsi/percorsi_per_sale/palazzo_nuovo/galleria/statua_di_leda_con_il_cigno . Museo del Prado: Leda, white marble, c. 135 CE, Museo del Prado, Spain, E000009: https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/leda/2b45e725-8a41-45dc-a03e-9f1ec16128a2

[264] The head of the Getty-Leda was taken from a statue of Aphrodite: Lapatin and Wight, *Handbook of the Antiquities Collection*, 151. It should be noted, however, that other iterations of Leda's head (and of the so-called Timotheos type) do not show Leda's gaze caught by the swan's spell: she merely looks up and off in the distance. For example, see the iterations of this statue mentioned in the notes 40 and 42.

nonchalance, she props up the "swan" with one hand at the hip as if it were just an ordinary water jug. Greek artists had, in fact, been making naturalistic "bird vessels" from at least the seventh century BCE. Roman glassworkers also made bird vessels that appear strikingly similar to the "swan" in question and generally date from the first to third centuries CE **[Figures 2.5-6]**.[265] When such vessels were created, glass workers would blow such vessels into the shape of fowl, leaving a small opening into which perfume could be carefully poured. Lastly, the opening would be fused with an additional layer of glass. When it was time for the perfume to be used, the tip of the "bird's" tail-feathers (or beak) would be broken, and its contents poured upon the skin. [266] Had rationalist spectators known about such vessels, they could have imagined the myth of Leda and the Swan as a misperception of a purely human event: there is no divinity in zoomorphic form, merely a woman perfuming her skin in the moments just after her bath (or else holding a bird-shaped water vessel).

Consider, moreover, what happens to the swan's animality when it is considered from multiple vantage points. (It would likely be a mistake to assume that ancient spectators only gazed at the statue frontally). When Roman subjects viewed the Leda

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[265] For ancient Greek bird-vessels see: Mario A. Del Chiaro, "Late Etruscan 'Duck-Askoi,'" *Source: Revue Archéologique* (1978), 27-38, esp. 27, 29. Some well-preserved examples of Roman glass vessels that imitate waterfowl (c. 1st to 2nd centuries CE) can be seen at The Corning Museum of Glass (inv. nos. 59.1.141; 66.1.223) and The British Museum (inv. no. 1878,1230.97): https://www.cmog.org/artwork/vessel-form-bird?search=collection%3A963733f3e0b934e299d08f554b1c2e6f&page=4

https://www.cmog.org/artwork/vessel-shaped-bird?search=collection%3A54b1bda39405470cbb96c348b2d544cf&page=7
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/G_1878-1230-97

[266] See the description of inv. no. 66.1.223 from the Corning Museum of Glass (prior footnote).

statue from the right side, Leda's uplifted fabric would have veiled the swan's neck and face, thus covering the features most likely to be read mythologically. When the Leda statue is seen obliquely from the left, Leda's arm likewise obscures the view of the swan's face, increasing the bird's "vessel-like" appearance. Now consider the tail feathers **[Figure 2.4].** At the moment, we cannot know whether the tailfeathers were once painted in a similar (or divergent) color scheme as Leda's fabric. However, a formally similar fresco of Leda and the Swan (1st century) from the Villa Arianna Stabiae envisions Leda's clothing in a pale pinkish hue that is not far off from the swan's white feathers.[267] Whatever the painted program may have been like, the sculptor has carved the feathers into "pleats" that optically mimic the loose fabric it covers. In its current state, the eyes easily lose track of these tailfeathers, and thus the scene's zoomorphism. Anamorphism, then, could supply rationalist spectators with yet other reasons to objectify and disenchant mythical change. Such potential interpretations, moreover, would have only been strengthened by broader visual landscape, where viewers expected to see sculptural depictions of nude women in languid poses surrounded by drapery and various vessels (e.g. the well-known marble carvings of the Aphrodite of Knidos or the Three Graces).[268]

So far, we have observed that as rationalist viewers walked around this statue, the swan's formal ambiguities could have led to various competing artistic readings (as a divine swan, as merely a swan, or as a swan-shaped vessel). Linguistically, the Latin verb

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[267] *LIMC* s.v. "Leda" 66; Leda and the Swan, fresco, 1st century CE, Villa Arianna at Stabiae, Naples National Archaeological Museum. Photo by Carole Raddato, Wikimedia commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Roman_fresco_depicting_Leda_and_the_Swan,_from_the_cubiculum_of_Villa_Arianna_at_Stabiae,_Naples_National_Archaeological_Museum_(17305105338).jpg

[268] See: Statue Group of the Three Graces, marble, 2nd century CE, Rome, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2010.260: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/256403

ambigo literally meant "to go about or around," but it also meant to "be undecided, to doubt." An apt Greek parallel was *amphiballō* (ἀμφιβάλλω), which could mean "to be in doubt, hesitate," but could also mean "to circle, surround." [269] This sculpture may have participated in this linguistic zeitgeist, as the divine swan's disenchantment was predicated upon the ambiguous form of the 'swan's' body, as well as the effects of multiperspectival viewing, as Roman subjects moved "about or around" the statue. It is also worth adding that, as in the English language, Greek and Latin terms like "*strephō*" (στρέφω) and "*verto*" held the double valance of "turn" and "transform," and were implicated in physical motions (*verto*: literally, "to turn, to turn round, or about," but also "to change, alter, transform"; *strephō*: "to turn," "turn round," "to cause to rotate," and "to transform, change," or "transmute").[270] Thus, as viewers moved around this Leda, their perspectives may have undergone a transformation: the inveterate expectation of witnessing divine-animality "turned" into a natural event—a woman holding a (tame) swan, or else an elegant zoomorphic vessel, which she used to perfume her body after her bath. Metamorphosis itself had been "turned" into a disenchanted historical event.

Lastly, the Leda sculpture also makes broader epistemological claims. Although sensory experience is the basis of experience and perception, the knowledge derived from the senses can nonetheless be specious, given the complexities and ambiguities of the world as it really exists. Even if the traditional tales of the long distant past had been

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[269] Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *ambigo*; s.v. ἀμφιβάλλω in Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*; Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

[270] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. στρέφω; Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *verto*.

reported with genuine intent, yet it was still possible for blunders to distort a natural event into an *Unbelievable Tale...in Which Nature is Violated*.

Rationalist Interpretations of Actaeon's Metamorphosis

During Greco-Roman antiquity, the myth of Actaeon was one of the more popular representations of metamorphosis[271] Scholars have observed a general diachronic development in the iconography of the Actaeon myth. Starting in the sixth century BCE, images of Actaeon's death appeared on Greek vessels that likely had a Dionysiac context. Rather than appearing in the form of a deer, Actaeon often appears as a satyr-like man (nude, bearded, erect penis, Dionysiac vines swirl about), who is beset by his hounds. During this time period, the textual evidence was limited and fragmentary. Indeed, the first complete narration of the Actaeon myth is Ovid's account in the *Metamorphoses*.[272] During the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, depictions of Actaeon diverge in the way they represent Actaeon's death. On the one hand, depictions emphasize Actaeon's turn toward animality **[Figure 2.7]**: often, a growth of antlers rises from his head, and sometimes he sports a sharp new pair of satyr-like ears. Typically, Actaeon appears assaulted by a pack of hounds, sometimes brandishes a weapon such as a dagger (or spear), and he often appears nude except for a cape that is wrapped around his neck (or has fallen down one arm in the melee). Depictions of Actaeon in the mixed form of a deer-man gained in popularity, largely reaching canonical status from the fourth century until Roman

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[271]. Annetta Alexandridis, "Shifting Species. Animal and Human Bodies in Attic Vase Painting of the 6th and 5th Centuries BC," in *Bodies and Boundaries in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, ed. Thorsten Fögen and Mireille M. Lee (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 263.

[272] For the satyr-like appearance, see: Alexandridis, "Shifting Species," 264; *LIMC* s.v. "Aktaion," nos. 2-3, 6, 11, 22. Cf. the textual and visual chronology offered in: Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 197, 199-200.

times.[273] On the other hand, scholars have noted that there was an alternative tradition in which artists represented Actaeon wearing a deerskin cloak, beset by a pack of hounds, often with the goddess Artemis standing nearby **[Figure 2.8-9].**[274] Scholars have debated what the motif of the deerskin cloak might mean. It has been argued to be an indirect hint at Actaeon's deer-transformation, as Classical artists struggled to depict the body-spirit relationship in ways that came naturally to textual representations; [275] It has also been tentatively suggested to be either a rationalization of zoomorphic transformation or (again) an alternative mode of depicting transformation.[276] Most recently, Annetta Alexandridis has performed the most detailed analysis of the deerskin motif, arguing, I think persuasively, that this visual theme was likely an attempt to disallow visual mergers of human and animal natures, though she does not positively identify the cause for this skepticism towards hybridity.[277] Her assessment fits the broader attitude toward myth during the fifth century, in which rationalistic discourse, it has been argued, seriously challenged (and sometimes upstaged) the miraculous aspects of myth as the most meaningful way of interpreting life and the world.[278]

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[273] For images that depict Actaeon's animality, see *LIMC* s.v. "Aktaion," nos. 38, plus numerous examples 45ff. The best diachronic observations are made in: Alexandridis, "Shifting Species," 263-270, 277-79. Cf. Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 199-201.

[274] *LIMC* s.v. "Aktaion," nos. 26-33.

[275] Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 200.

[276] For commentary, see: Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 98-109.

[277] Alexandridis, "Shifting Species," 267.

[278] Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 16; Jan N. Bremmer, "Myth, Mythology, and Mythography," in *The Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies*, ed. George Boys-Stones, Barbara Graziosi, and Phiroze Vasunia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 684; Jan N. Bremmer, "The Theriomorphism of the Ancient Greek Gods," in *Animals in Ancient Greek Religion*, ed. Julia Kindt (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), 112. Hawes has also nuanced some of these

Yet the rationalization of the Actaeon myth was more than an iconographic concern. It also implicated questions related to perception. Rationalists often explained away the Actaeon myth by appealing to some ambiguity that the senses could misinterpret. In Palaephatus' estimation, the original witnesses misheard the word "devour." What really happened was that the hounds had actually "devoured" Actaeon's livelihood, meaning that Actaeon frittered away his days hunting.[279] Other rationalist narratives ascribed Actaeon's purported transformation to an optical slipup or derangement of mental vision. Thus, Pausanias (c. 110 – c. 180 CE) records the views of Stesichorus (c. 630 – 555 BCE), while also adding his own commentary:

> Stesichorus of Himera says that the goddess cast a deerskin round Actaeon to make sure that his hounds would kill him, so as to prevent his taking Semele to wife. My own view is that without divine interference the hounds of Actaeon were smitten with madness (λύσσα), and so they were sure to tear to pieces without distinction everybody they chanced to meet.[280]

Here Pausanias' view was that the hounds had a type of insanity or rabies (λύσσα). Ancient texts describe states of insanity in which viewers falsely see human beings in zoomorphic forms. Acting like predators, they hunt down their victims and dismember their flesh (e.g., Pentheus, Lycurgus; described in detail in chapter three). Yet this was no divine spell of insanity as occurs in Dionysiac myth. Pausanias was keen to record that the insanity (likely with hallucinations) of the hounds occurred "without divine

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arguments, which can at times seem like a linear development from myth to rationality, showing that a plurality of voices perdured throughout Greco-Roman times in the contest over the rationality of myth. Hawes, *Rationalizing Myth*, 224.

[279] Stern, *On Unbelievable Tales*, 38-39.

[280] *Description of Greece*, *Boeotia* 2.3-4: "Στησίχορος δὲ ὁ Ἱμεραῖος ἔγραψεν ἐλάφου περιβαλεῖν δέρμα Ἀκταίωνι τὴν θεόν, παρασκευάζουσάν οἱ τὸν ἐκ τῶν κυνῶν θάνατον, ἵνα δὴ μὴ γυναῖκα Σεμέλην λάβοι. ἐγὼ δὲ ἄνευ θεοῦ πείθομαι νόσον λύσσαν τοῦ Ἀκταίωνος ἐπιλαβεῖν τοὺς κύνας· μανέντες δὲ καὶ οὐ διαγινώσκοντες διαφορήσειν ἔμελλον πάντα τινὰ ὅτῳ περιτύχοιεν."

interference." Actaeon's doom, then, was a natural event that did not require a magical or divine explication. Such ideas echo modern medical descriptions of rabies, in which even mild cases include "sensory disturbances." However, in the case of "furious rabies," symptoms include "hypersalivation," meanwhile sensory miscues are exacerbated to the point of "intermittent episodes of excitement, hallucinations and maniacal behavior." [281] Stesichorus' reading of the Actaeon myth preserves another tradition in which Actaeon's doom was imputed to divine power, yet the miraculous change had been tamed. Artemis, we learn, simply threw a "deerskin" over his body, which the hounds (and Greek oral tradition) mistook for a skin-changing transformation. Whether it was the effect of insanity or Actaeon's disguise in a deerskin, these texts indicate that misperceptions caused original witnesses to see (or hear about) a metamorphic body that objectively was not present.

In what sort of setting might we expect to find a rationalizing depiction of the Actaeon myth? Given the rationalist approaches to the Actaeon myth offered by Stesichorus (c. 630 – 555 BCE), Anaximenes (c. 586 – c. 526 BCE), and Palaphaetus (4th century BCE), it may be that the beginning of rationalist imagery is quite early.[282] As Hawes has accurately observed, it should also be remembered that most ancient rationalists were not seeking to dismantle Greek religion entirely but sought to preserve myths in a more palatable way for some intellectuals.[283] It would likely be a mistake to assume that rationalizing images would only appear in purely secular contexts. Instead, it

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[281] See the description in the abstract of: D.A. Warrell, "The Clinical Picture of Rabies in Man," *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*,70 (1976):188-195.

[282] Jacob Stern and Palaephatus, *On Unbelievable Tales*, 38-39.

[283] Hawes, *Rationalizing Myth*, 225.

is likely that rationalizing images — just like their textual counterparts — could be found in settings in religious settings: presenting rationalist images that defended a "historical" yet disenchanted version of a myth, or depicting imagery with ambiguities that allow for enchantment or disenchantment depending on the spectator's subjectivities. Moreover, given the rationalistic emphasis on the misperception of myth, one wonders whether disenchanted images of Actaeon's transformation also concerned questions about perception (not merely iconographic form).

Consider, for instance, a limestone metope from the Temple of Hera (470 – 450 BCE). A quick glance, or a view from a distance, would seem to indicate the standard myth. Diana stands to one side as hounds assault a figure with "antlers" **[Figure 2.10]**. Yet a closer look reveals something curious: the goddess has placed a stag's head and skin on Actaeon's body; however, these are partially obscured behind the hero's neck and upraised arm.[284] The baying hounds have fallen prey to a perceptual trick. On the one hand, the hounds that gaze from below glimpse Actaeon's "ear" anamorphically (ἀναμορφόω; to "transform"), seeing the stag's ear as if it were Actaeon's own **[Figure 2.11]**. [285] Meanwhile, the hound that leaps from behind sees a similar illusion: sharp ears and antlers that rise from Actaeon's head **[Figure 2.12].** It is the goddess herself who has the true vision of the stag's face, which is otherwise veiled by Actaeon's body.

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[284] Forbes Irving has noted the deerskin but has not examined how it is obscured from certain viewpoints. Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 200; *LIMC* s.v. "Aktaion" no. 31.
[285] That the anamorphic gaze would be employed to transform myth into rational forms is fitting, even if the first surviving textual reference is much later. Philostratus (3rd century CE), in fact, used the Greek verb anamorphoo (ἀναμορφόω; to "transform") to describe an image of metamorphosis: one in which Heracles, wearing a lion's skin, wrestles the shapeshifting body of the water-deity Achelous, and steals his "horn" (κεράς). See *Imagines, Heracles or Achelous* 4.3.

Interestingly, as ancient subjects approached this relief, they would have seen it from below and at a distance, with the same anamorphic distortions as Actaeon's excited hounds. Only the gods, artists on scaffolds, or architects and patrons, likely knew the "true" account of Actaeon's demise. Such anamorphic distortions fit with the other optical illusions of this Doric order temple, including the extension of the final metopes, entasis, and diminishing at the corners.[286]

The imagination of this myth could be warped in other ways, often by offering a double perspective of the Actaeon's death. One Etruscan urn may provide a case in point. While Etruria did not simply mirror Greco-Roman thinking and had its own distinct culture, Etruscan representations of Actaeon beset by hounds witness one area of shared visual culture.[287] Ancient viewers who approached one Etruscan urn from a distance may have thought they saw the traditional representation of Actaeon's metamorphosis **[Figure 2.13]**. Close looking, however, demystifies Actaeon's animality, as his "antlers" turn out to be some untamed tufts of hair and the crook of his upraised club **[Figure 2.14].** While noticing these visual disenchantments, literate viewers, moreover, might demonstrate their wit, remarking that the Greek and Latin terms for "horn" or "antler" (κεράς, *cornu*) might also refer to "the end of a stick," "stiff hair," or "a mode of dressing the hair."[288] Again, it is the hounds that see from below and err with their eyes. The implication seems

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[286] Enzo Lippolis, Monica Livadiotti, and Giorgio Rocco, *Architettura Greca: Storia E Monumenti Del Mondo Della Polis Dalle Origini Al v Secolo* (Milano: B. Mondadori, 2007), 833-834.

[287] Carl C. Schlam, "Diana and Actaeon: Metamorphoses of a Myth," *Classical Antiquity* 3 (1984): 94.

[288] Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. κεράς; Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *cornua*. Other images of Actaeon fighting off his hounds with an upraised club or weapon do exist but not all would optically mimic an antler from a distance: *LIMC* s.v. "Aktaion" nos. 6, 11, 16, 32, 24, 25.

to be that beholding miraculous change is to perceive the world as do the hounds; that is, to imagine myth with a wild bestial mind.

When artists depicted Actaeon's transformation with antlers growing from his skull, they envisioned metamorphosis as a process of change through corporeal hybridization. In such scenes, the viewer sees Actaeon as a "deer-man." For rationalists, the existence of hybrids (like metamorphosis) could be explained away through optics, as in Lucretius' disenchantment of hybrids. In his atomist worldview, matter produced tiny images that sped towards the eyes. Seeing objects at a distance especially changed the perception of form since air blunted details and angles into new forms, as when the squared towers of a city appear rounder from a distance.[289] Such an optical theory also explained how honest viewers could mistake natural objects for supernatural phenomena, which he was sure did not exist. When viewers thought they saw supernatural phenomena like ghosts or especially hybrids (centaurs, Scyllas, Cerberus, etc.), this was because the air provided a medium in which the images emitted from objects might mix and combine themselves into the appearance of strange new forms.[290] Even rationalists who betray no

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[289] *De Rerum Natura* 4.353-363: "Quadratasque procul turris cum cernimus urbis, propterea fit uti videantur saepe rutundae, angulus obtusus quia longe cernitur omnis, sive etiam potius non cernitur ac perit eius plaga nec ad nostras acies perlabitur ictus, aera per multum quia dum simulacra feruntur, cogit hebescere eum crebris offensibus aer. hoc ubi suffugit sensum simul angulus omnis, fit quasi ut ad tornum saxorum structa terantur—non tamen ut coram quae sunt vereque rutunda, sed quasi adumbratim paulum simulata videntur." ("And when afar off we see the foursquare towers of a city, they often appear to be round, for this reason, because every angle at a distance is seen blunted or rather it is not seen at all, its blow is lost and the stroke does not glide across to our eyes; because, while the images are rushing through a great space of air, the air with frequent buffetings forces it to become blunt. By this means when every angle at once has escaped our vision, the stone structures appear as though rounded on a lathe; not, however, like things that are close before us and really round, but they appear somewhat similar in a shadowy fashion").

[290] *De Rerum Natura* 4.732-748: "Centauros itaque et Scyllarum membra videmus Cerbereasque canum facies simulacraque eorum quorum morte obita tellus amplectitur ossa, omne genus quoniam passim simulacra feruntur,
partim sponte sua quae fiunt aere in ipso, partim quae variis ab rebus cumque recedunt et quae confiunt ex horum facta figuris. nam certe ex vivo Centauri non fit imago, nulla fuit quoniam talis natura animalis;

atomistic proclivities provided similar rationalizations of myth, as in Heraclitus' disenchantment of the centaur myth:

> It is said that around Mt. Pelion and Mt. Pholoe there were creatures of double form: above the flanks they had the bodies of men; but all the rest was horse. But this is not true. For it is impossible for two different creatures joined together in this way to be born alive or to grow. Rather, at a time when horseback riding was still unknown, these were the first to sit upon their horses. They overran and plundered the plains. And to those who first saw them from a distance they gave the appearance of being made of two creatures.[291]

Here it would likely be a misnomer to use the term "demythologization" (*Entmythologisierung*) as has traditionally appeared in scholarship to describe Heraclitus' efforts.[292] For all Heraclitus' historical bravado, his own senses cannot access the long distant history of which he claims to be the expert. His history is, in fact, an act of storytelling—an imaginative creation of a new myth that is sensitive to rationalist sympathies. In this rationalist centaur-myth—as in the earlier Etruscan urn's rationalist

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verum ubi equi atque hominis casu convenit imago, haerescit facile extemplo, quod diximus ante, propter subtilem naturam et tenvia texta. cetera de genere hoc eadem ratione creantur. quae cum mobiliter summa levitate feruntur, ut prius ostendi, facile uno commovet ictu quaelibet una animum nobis subtilis imago; tenvis enim mens est et mire mobilis ipsa."
("Thus it is we see Centaurs, and the frames of Scyllas, and faces of dogs like Cerberus, and images of those for whom death is past, whose bones rest in earth's embrace, since images of all kinds are being carried about everywhere, some that arise spontaneously in the air itself, some that are thrown off from all sorts of things, others that are made of a combination of these shapes. For certainly no image of a Centaur comes from one living, since there never was a living thing of this nature; but when the images of man and horse meet by accident, they easily adhere at once, as I said before, on account of their fine nature and thin texture. All other things of this class are made in the same way. And since these are carried about with velocity because of their extreme lightness, as I explained before, any given one of these fine images easily bestirs our mind by a single impression; for the mind is itself thin and wonderfully easy to move.")

[291] The primary text is found in: Stern, "On Unbelievable Tales," no. 5: "Λέγεται περὶ τὸ Πήλιον καὶ τὴν Φολόην γεγονέναι διφθεῖς, τὰ μὲν επάνω τῶν λαγόνων ανδρῶν ἔχοντας, τὸ δ' απὸ {τούτου} τοῦ μέρους πᾶν ἵππων. οὐκ αληθὲς δὲ τοῦτο. δύο γὰρ δηλλαγμένας φύσεις εἰς ἕν συνελθούσας αδύνατον ζῳογονηθῆναι καὶ τραφῆναι. αλλ' ἔτι τῆς τῶν ἵππων χρήσεως οὔσης αγνώστου, πρῶτοι καθίσαντες εφ' ἵππων κατέρεχον τὰ πεδία λεηστεύοντες, φαντασίαν τε απετέλεσαν τοῖς πρώτως θεασαμένοις μακρόθεν, ὡς εκ δυοῖν εισι γεγόνοτες φύσεων." An earlier yet lengthier iteration of the myth is found in work of Palaephatus, which bears the same name as Heraclitus' work. Stern, *On Unbelievable Tales*, 30-31.

[292] As it relates to demythologization, an excellent description of the state of the field is found in Michael Koortbojian, *Myth, Meaning, and Memory on Roman Sarcophagi* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 138-141.

depiction of Actaeon's metamorphosis—one is presented with a double perspective. Viewers think they see centaurs from a distance, but close looking reveals that the "centaurs" were just the first people to discover horseback riding.

The double vantage point, or the skeptical "double-take," was deeply entrenched in the broader Greco-Roman linguistic imagination of doubt. The Latin noun *dubius* meant that something was "doubtful," but it also meant "held as two or double," just as the verb *dubito* meant "to be in doubt," or "to have or hold, as two." Although these could refer to mental states such as "vacillating in mind," such words were also implicated in physical motions (*dubius*: "wavering," "moving in two directions alternately,"; *dubito*: "to vibrate from one side to the other, to and fro").[293] Similarly, in Greek the verb *diastazō* (διαστάζω) meant "to doubt, hesitate," or to choose "a double-stance."[294] Just as by the first century, one could call a doubting person one who was "double-minded" (δίψυχος), or one could use the Latin noun *ambiguitas* to refer to an "ambiguity," that is, something with a "double sense."[295] Such ideas permeate the rationalist approach to the mythological sculptures and reliefs we have discussed thus far, as viewers discover that a closer second look at myth might dispel the enchanted aspects of metamorphosis.

Lastly, it is worth telling a brief story regarding the rationalization of the metamorphic image. The account concerns one of the best-known statues of Actaeon to

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[293] Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *dubius* and *dubito*.

[294] Montanari et al., *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, s.v. διαστάζω. The phrase choosing "a double-stance" is found in the online Greek dictionary for Helps Ministries: HELPS Word-studies: https://biblehub.com/greek/1365.htm

[295] Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *ambiguitas*. Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, s.v. δίψυχος. Cf. "A double minded (δίψυχος) man is unstable in all his ways" (James 1:8).

have survived from Roman antiquity, which is now held in the British Museum **[Figure 2.15].** Ostensibly, we see the standard representation of the myth: a primarily nude man with antlers defending himself from growling hounds. Yet this statue (like many others from antiquity) has been the subject of extensive restoration during the 18th century. Although the original head was found without antlers, some were soon restored to the head. It has been claimed that the restoration of these antlers was a success because there are visible traces of antler roots. However, even in the 18th century, these antlers were the subject of some debate. Townly remarked that the antiquarian Gavin Hamilton's restoration sketches had given Actaeon a new set of "horns." Hamilton then responded with some frustration, "I never restore anything without antique authority." [296] After Hamilton cited relevant "horned" *comparanda*, Townly's misgivings were assuaged, and he purchased the statue. Nevertheless, in this case, whether the head's antlers were restored correctly makes little difference. The head itself was not, in fact, original. Instead, it was a different Actaeon-head that Hamilton had found and repurposed.[297] The story's plot gets more complicated when we learn that a second identical Actaeon statue had actually been found at the same archeological site, the Villa of Antoninus Pius (Lazio). This second statue was initially in better condition, having its original head still

[296] The description of the Actaeon statue at the British Museum (1805,0703.3) concludes: "In this case at least his claim was justified, since the roots of the antlers are clearly visible on Actaeon's forehead." The citation about horns comes from the same source. However, a more in-depth discussion regarding the interactions between Townley and Hamilton regarding the Actaeon statue (now found in the British Museum) is discussed in depth by Maree Clegg in her recent doctoral dissertation. Maree Clegg, "Eighteenth-Century Restoration of Ancient Sculptures: Questions of Authenticity in the Collection of Charles Townley" (Ph.D. diss., University of Auckland, 2020), 31-32 ("horns"), 62, 66-69. On pages 68-69, she persuasively concludes: "All of the [artistic] example cited by Townley Actaeon with horns, so it can be surmised that Townley was not necessarily concerned that the sculpture looked as the ancient Roman artists intended, but rather that it was recognizable as Actaeon and that it matched other representations."

[297] Clegg, "Eighteenth-Century Restoration," 32: "Townley purchased the second group offered by Hamilton, which had a different head Hamilton had found for the purpose."

intact. Unfortunately, the statue is now lost, but Friedrich Anders 1774 drawing captures its rationalist impulses **[Figure 2.16]**: there are no antlers, no pointed ears, and no animal body. Just a hunter clothed in animal skins, beset by two snarling dogs, who—whether under the spell of rabies or crazed by the excitement of the hunt—now mistake a close human friend for prey. In the end, perhaps a reason we have failed to see ancient rationalist disenchantments of the metamorphic image may ironically have been partially caused by the visual horizons of modern rationalism itself.

Conclusion

I have argued that certain images of metamorphosis rely on visual ambiguities, the spectator's movements, and optical tricks (such as anamorphism, and close versus distant looking) in order to allow for the potential of rationalist interpretations of the metamorphic image. This claim does not mean that all viewers would have disenchanted these images of Leda and Actaeon, but that such images were sufficiently ambiguous to allow for double-interpretations: one viewer might glimpse a miraculous change; another could explain it away as the misperception of a quotidian event. The rationalist metamorphic image was not an iconoclastic pursuit that sought to rid society of myth, religion, or the gods but an attempt to open a dialogue regarding the "true" history of the mythical past. In exploring the myths of Leda and Actaeon, we have seen that the double-perspective was essential for the rationalist enterprise. In ancient Greece, for instance, writers like the mythographer Palaephatus (4th century BCE) and even the poet Euripides (c. 480 – c. 406 BCE) juxtaposed traditional tales alongside new rationalist readings. During Roman antiquity, writers like Heraclitus (1st or 2nd CE) and Philostratus (c. 170 – 247/250 CE) also employed the double-perspective to open up space for disenchanted

historical readings of the mythical past. One of the favored tactics of rationalism was to emphasize that the original eyewitnesses of myth incorrectly saw or incorrectly heard some true underlying story behind a metamorphic myth. As Greco-Roman subjects analyzed images of metamorphosis, these likely sparked debates about the historicity of myth. During such conversations, the double-perspective of doubt was likely on the tip of the tongue. Not only did the Greek verb *diastazō* (διαστάζω) mean “to doubt, hesitate,” but it literally meant to choose "a double-stance." Doublings were even more common in Latin. The verb *dubito* meant “to be in doubt,” or “to have or hold, as two,” while the noun *dubius* meant that something was "doubtful," but it also meant "held as two or double." Meanwhile, the Latin noun *ambiguitas* signified something with a "double sense" or "ambiguity." Often the disenchantment of myth was not an effort to present a single rationalizing message but to present viewers with ambiguities and doublings that could be debated. As we have seen, both Lucretius (c. 99 — 55 BCE) and Heraclitus (1st or 2nd century CE) attributed the aetiologies of hybrids or "creatures of double form" to the optical distortions that attended viewing bodies from a distance (again, the double perspective of close versus distant viewing). In like manner, the artist who created the relief on the Volterran urn (2nd century BCE) depicted Actaeon so that distant spectators saw him as a deer-man. Yet closer inspection revealed ambiguities that allowed for the disenchantment of his hybrid representation of metamorphic change.

While space did not allow for an exhaustive study of every image of Leda and Actaeon, I would nonetheless like to conclude by briefly situating the images we have examined in this chapter as part of a more extensive corpus of imagery that held forth the potential for rationalist readings. The *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*

lists a corpus of 121 images of "Actaion," some of which might have appealed to rationalists. In many cases, Actaeon displays no signs of zoomorphism (13 instances), such as pointed ears, antlers, or even an entire stag's head.[298] Yet other images depict a purely anthropomorphic Actaeon, while supplying a possible phenomenological rationale for why the hounds mistook their companion for a prey animal: the hounds mistook Actaeon's deerskin cloak for an actual deerskin (2 cases), or they mistook his upraised club and wild hair (6 cases) for antlers.[299] In a couple of cases, Roman artists used perspectival illusionism to depict Actaeon's death in the fictive recesses of the landscape; the viewer sees Actaeon at a distance, where it is unclear whether he is becoming an animal or not.[300] In such examples, a spectator might choose to see a miraculous change (e.g., an anthropomorphic Actaeon just before his transformation) or to imagine a strictly historical event that the original witnesses (or storytellers) had misperceived or embellished.

What overall historical trends might be gleaned from the visual evidence? The first metamorphic images of Actaeon that allow for rationalization began in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Yet during the Second Sophistic (c. 50 — 230 CE), the Roman world represented metamorphosis in a polarized manner. We witness greater emphasis on zoomorphism as depictions of the antler-growing Actaeon increase in popularity, reaching nigh canonical status.[301] But metamorphic images that allowed for debates about

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[298] *LIMC* s.v. "Aktaion," nos. 6, 9d, 15, 18c, 19, 20, 22, 23, 36, 88, 118a (?), 121, 124.

[299] *LIMC* s.v. "Aktaion." For the deerskin see nos. 27, 31; for the upraised club, see nos. 11, 13a, 16, 24, 25a, 30.

[300] *LIMC* s.v. "Aktaion," nos. 95-96.

[301] For the Actaeon with antlers (or a stag's head), see: *LIMC* s.v. "Aktaion," nos. 35-81, 107-112.

myth's disenchantments also found elite patronage, as in the case of the statue from the villa of Antoninus Pius, which originally depicted Actaeon without antlers and wearing an animal hide **[Figures 2.15-16].** [302] Similarly, the Getty Leda was discovered at the Palatine Hill, and numerous iterations of this popular sculptural type were produced. Yet it was also during the Second Sophistic (and occasionally Late Antiquity) that the most manifestly supernatural and wildly erotic depictions of Leda of the Swan usually survive, as the terrible swan engulfs Leda's body and charms her eyes with his mesmerizing gaze **[Figure 1.40-42, 2.1].**[303] All this suggests a societal split regarding metamorphic imagery, as spectators debated the enchantments and disenchantments of myth.

One of the limitations of this argument is that it has been confined to the myths of Leda and Actaeon so far. In chapter three, I will expand this argument about the phenomenology of disenchantment so that it includes Niobe's metamorphosis. As we shall see, from Homer to Ovid and beyond, travelers imagined stone monuments on Mount Sipylus (on the Aegean inside of Turkey) to be the petrified body of Niobe. However, not everyone believed these natural wonders to be enchanted. Pausanias (c. 110 CE — 180 CE) and Quintus Smyrnaeus (c. latter 4th century) disenchanted this monument through twin viewings: from a distance, the eyes glimpsed a rocky face in the form of a woman, but at close range, viewers could see that it was merely a fragment of the mountain. It is to this subject, and the insanities and delusions of Bacchus' metamorphic powers, that we now turn.

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[302] Cf. *LIMC* s.v. "Actaion" nos 36 9d.

[303] *LIMC* s.v. "Leda" nos. 82-101, 117a-133.

CHAPTER 3

ILLUSIONS OF METAMORPHOSIS: INSANITY, PAREIDOLIA, AND THE ENCHANTMENT OF LANDSCAPE

The previous chapter examined rationalist approaches to the metamorphic image. This chapter charts the opposite course by exploring the relationship between images of metamorphosis and Bacchic madness (insanity) and pareidolia. Psychologists use the latter term to describe the natural human tendency to imagine anthropomorphic or zoomorphic forms in the random patterns of the natural world, as in Rorschach ink-blot tests. Greco-Roman writers attest to pareidolic viewing of clouds, stones, tree bark, and the moon, or even interpreting wilderness sounds as the hauntings of disembodied souls or furtive mythical creatures. Ancient rationalists often chided pareidolic viewing practices for their tendency to ascribe miraculous aetiologies to quotidian monuments in the natural world. What insanity and pareidolia had in common in Greco-Roman antiquity was the tendency for viewers to "see" (or hear) faces and bodies—often imagined as metamorphic bodies—which existed primarily as mental representations, whether through hallucinations or imaginative musings. There is also a biological link between pareidolic viewing and hallucinations. While neuroscientists have observed that brains are generally preconditioned towards pareidolic discernment, such illusions are heightened in brains susceptible to hallucinations. Indeed, because "[p]areidolic illusions are an experimental analogue of hallucinations," doctors may train patients with pareidolic imagery to practice discerning between illusion and reality. In general, hallucinations tend to occur more often in males, especially as brains decline with age, a fact that may have been observed in

antiquity since the quintessential myths about mania tend to center around men, such as kings Pentheus and Lycurgus, who have achieved some level of seniority.[304]

This chapter makes two contributions. First, although scholars have identified representations of Bacchic myths and made insightful observations (related style, iconography, social readings, etc.), the dominant rationalist approach has not allowed us to fully grasp how images could entice viewers into these worlds of insanity and transformation. The state of the field is so heavily weighted toward rationality that even though divine mania is a major theme in Bacchic myth, the dominant scholarly approaches to Bacchic art only mention madness in passing or sometimes overlook it entirely. [305] I thus explore more expansive modes of viewing images as enchanted. For instance, material qualities can evoke embodiment and change and rituals, movements, and shifting conditions of light and shadow that evoke spiritual presence. Put differently, an artifact's material properties combine with candlelight, allowing the spectator to

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[304] A. Y. Tien, "Distribution of Hallucinations of the Population," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 26 (1991): 287-92, esp. 292; Alan Robert Bowman et al., "Compensator Shifts in Visual Perception are Associated with Hallucinations in Lewy Body Disorders," *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications* 2 (2017): 1-9.

[305] For example, in one study, stylistic analysis is applied to the Pentheus myth, and the images are used as textual illustrations: Ernesto De Carolis, Gods and Heroes in Pompeii (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2002): 21-22, 45. One textual study of mania is useful, but its descriptions of images are brief and limited to formalistic analysis; there is no mention of how the images themselves might conjure psychological phenomena: Yulia Ustinova, *Divine Mania: Alteration of Consciousness in Ancient Greece* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), 174-178; more stylistic analysis is found in Roger Ling, *Roman Painting*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 78, 125,176. Another approach reduces scenes of Bacchic madness to simply the display of high culture: Roger Ling, "The Arts of Living" in John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, and Oswyn Murray eds. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 316. Even studies that focus exclusively on the representation of Dionysiac art at Pompeii may bypass any mention of Bacchic mania and the irrational: Shelley Hales, "Dionysos at Pompeii," *British School at Athens Studies* 15 (2007): 335-341. Elsewhere, the scholarly literature devoted to the Lycurgus Cup is vast and does indeed examine its changeling material qualities, yet does the explore its major mythical themes like metamorphosis and madness (See bibliography in this chapter for the section titled: "Metamorphosis and the Madness of "Bloodthirsty" Lycurgus [c. 300-400 CE]").

witness transformations from one state to another (both material and mythical changes are represented within media such as stone or glass). We also witness how the afterlife of artistic prototypes could conjure hallucinatory double-visions. In so doing, I examine artistic representations of Bacchic metamorphic myths, including those of king Pentheus and Lycurgus. Second, whereas prior examinations of pareidolia have insightfully examined marble veining (particularly book-matched marble),[306] This chapter examines sculptural and aural pareidolia: colossal monuments made of stone, strange anthropomorphic-looking trees, and artworks that produced aural phenomena that seemingly evinced the traces of mythical beings that eluded physical sight (e.g., Echo, Hylas, sometimes Pan). In so doing, we explore for the first time the relationship between pareidolia and metamorphosis and observe how pareidolia provoked the rancor of rationalist writers, who deconstructed pareidolia by appealing to the science of ancient optics and acoustics (e.g., Lucretius, Pausanias). In exploring pareidolia and manias, I argue that images of metamorphosis are equally concerned with the physical work of art as the viewer's own mental representations. In addition, we can embrace a broader definition of what counts as an image of metamorphosis. Such imagery was once discovered in the wonders of the natural monuments or even wilderness sounds. In other cases, images conjured mental representations of metamorphic manias.

Metamorphosis and the Madness of Pentheus

Throughout Greco-Roman antiquity, there were many who developed an artistic mania for metamorphosis. Households across the Mediterranean began to be filled with

[306] For the bibliography, see the more detailed state of the field in the section of this chapter titled: "'Seeing' Faces and Forms: Sculptural Pareidolia and the Enchantment of Landscape."

images and objects that depicted Bacchic myths about metamorphosis and madness (insanity). Philologically “meta-morphosis” is a “change-in-form,” but it can also refer to a “change-in-appearance.”[307] Generally, metamorphosis involves transformations in which bodily appearance changes (e.g., into animals, plants, or new human forms), but the soul remains hidden (See the section titled "Seeing Souls in Skins" in chapter 1). Yet Bacchic illusions of metamorphosis invert the body-spirit relationship, as hallucinations or phantoms warp the appearance of bodies from outside the skin, in effect, disguising a mortal body through perceptual illusions of animality. Yulia Ustinova has called this type of visual mania "double vision," while Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos have called it “perceptual metamorphosis.” [308] In this chapter, I also employ such terminology and, for variety's sake, use the phrase "hallucinatory metamorphosis" synonymously.

In Greek antiquity, some of the most unsettling images pertain to Dionysiac myth. Annetta Alexandridis has shown that from archaic to classical Greece, the bulk of the images of human transformations also pertain to this Dionysiac imagination in which "drunkenness, enchantment and masquerade provide the frame for the transgression of boundaries of species."[309] We can see this in the well-known "eyecups." For many years scholars have recognized that drinking from such cups at the symposium could be a performance of metamorphosis. As the banqueter guzzled the brew of Dionysus, the

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[307] In ancient Greek “meta” + “morphē” amounts to “change” + “form” (or “appearance”). Liddell and Scott, s.v. μετα, μορφή, μορφόω, and μεταμορφόω.

[308] Ustinova, *Divine Mania*, 171; Ovid, Ingo Gildenhard and Andrew Zissos, *Ovid, Metamorphoses*, 3.511-733*: Latin Text with Introduction, Commentary, Glossary of Terms, Vocabulary Aid and Study Questions* (Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2016), 714-15.

[309] Annetta Alexandridis, "Shifting Species. Animal and Human Bodies in Attic Vase Painting of the 6th and 5th Centuries BC," in *Bodies and Boundaries in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, eds. Thorsten Fögen and Mireille M. Lee (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 267-86, esp. 261, 270-72, 274, 278.

abstract forms of the vessel would resemble a bestial mask with wild eyes, handle ears, and a snout **[Figure 3.1]**. As explained by Richard Neer: [310]

> The Dionysiac emblem par excellence, the mask is a figure of that alienation from self which defines both dramatic performance and drunken reverie. With an eyecup — any eyecup — the symposiast becomes an actor, a participant in a complex drama of presence and absence. One minute he is there among friends, and the next he is gone, replaced by the staring eyes of the cup/mask. He shuttles between the two, as the vessels eyes replace his own. The result is a certain fluidity of identity, a playful uncertainty as to just who is and what is what. Such play is absolutely typical of the Greek symposium.

By drinking, masking, and transforming, the drinker's identity is momentarily alienated from acquaintances at the symposium. With a bestial countenance, the drinker might seem to imitate that moment when Circe's enchanting brew transformed Odysseus's men into swine, whose transformation painters envisioned elsewhere as hog-headed men.[311]

In the Pentheus myth, we find an example of the relationship between supernatural change and bestial hallucinations. In Euripides *Bacchae* (c. 405 BCE), we encounter the myth of King Pentheus of Thebes, who was destroyed by the god's phantasmagoric spells. In the myth, Pentheus saw himself put shackles on the wine god, but in reality, he had merely bound the knees and hooves of a bull. In his madness, the king also saw an illusion of his house on fire and called his servants to put out the flames. Then Dionysus created an "apparition" (φάσμα) of his own body, which Pentheus rushed at headlong with "a dark-gleaming sword" and "stabbed at the air."[312] But after trying in vain to slaughter this

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[310] Blockquote from Richard Neer, Style and Politics in Athenian Vase-Painting (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 42. Cf. John Boardman, "A Curious Eye Cup," *Archaeologischer Anzeiger* (1976): 281-290, esp. 288; Alexandridis, "Shifting Species," 273.

[311] Analysis of the hog-headed men can be seen in: Richard Buxton, Forms of Astonishment: Greek Myths of Metamorphosis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Alexandridis, "Shifting Species," fig. 27; figs. 4-5.

[312] The full passage is *Bacchae* 627-637: "διαμεθεὶς δὲ τόνδε μόχθον, ὡς ἐμοῦ πεφευγότος, ἵεται ξίφος κελαινὸν ἁρπάσας δόμων ἔσω. κᾆθ᾽ ὁ Βρόμιος, ὡς ἔμοιγε φαίνεται, δόξαν λέγω, φάσμ᾽ ἐποίησεν κατ᾽ αὐλήν· ὁ δ᾽ ἐπὶ τοῦθ᾽ ὡρμημένος ᾖσσε κἀκέντει φαεννὸν <αἰθέρ᾽>, ὡς σφάζων ἐμέ. πρὸς δὲ τοῖσδ᾽ αὐτῷ τάδ᾽ ἄλλα Βάκχιος λυμαίνεται· δώματ᾽ ἔρρηξεν χαμᾶζε· συντεθράνωται δ᾽ ἅπαν πικροτάτους ἰδόντι

phantom form, Pentheus eventually dropped his sword in exhaustion. Pentheus's ultimate doom occurs later in the narrative when his uninitiated eyes glimpse the rights of Dionysus. There, the maenads—including his mother Agave and his aunt Autone—become insane and see Pentheus take the hallucinatory form of a wild beast (θήρ). Then his mother, like a priestess, "began the killing, hurling herself upon him" and tore off his left arm. The maenads, caught up in a frenzy, conclude the scene with the grizzly *sparagmos*: "Autonoe and the rest of the bacchic throng attacked him. The air was filled with cries: Pentheus moaned with all the breath he had in him, and the women raised the sacrificial shout. One woman was carrying an arm, another a foot still in its boot, his flanks were stripped bare, the flesh torn from them, and every woman, hands red with blood, hurled Pentheus' flesh about like a ball."[313]

One *Red-Figure Cup Showing the Death of Pentheus* envisions this butchery **[Figures 3.2-3]**. In one scene, symposiasts witness maenads (likely Agave and Autone) who have dismembered Pentheus' torso, while the opposite side of the vessel depicts maenads clutching the king's dismembered lower extremities. Yet, as in textual representations, what the maenads "see" might be just as important as what they touch. Each maenad's eyes are transfixed upon their share of the cadaver, alluding that they see

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δεσμοὺς τοὺς ἐμούς· κόπου δ᾽ ὕπο διαμεθεὶς ξίφος παρεῖται· πρὸς θεὸν γὰρ ὢν ἀνὴρ ἐς μάχην ἐλθεῖν ἐτόλμησ᾽. ἥσυχος δ᾽ ἐκβὰς ἐγὼ δωμάτων ἥκω πρὸς ὑμᾶς, Πενθέως οὐ φροντίσας." ("Then thinking that I had escaped he ceased from these efforts, snatched up a dark-gleaming sword, and rushed into the house. And then Bromios, I think—I'm telling you how it seemed to me—caused an apparition in the palace. Pentheus set off in pursuit of this and stabbed at <the air>, thinking he was slaughtering me. And the bacchic god did him other injury beyond this. He razed his house to the ground, the whole thing is shattered: he has seen a bitter end to his imprisoning of me. He has dropped his sword and is exhausted: though a man he dared to fight against a god. As for me, I left the house quietly and came to you, unconcerned about Pentheus.")

[313] The death of Pentheus is described in *Bacchae* 1095-1152. The block quote is at 1130-1136: "Αὐτονόη τ᾽ ὄχλος τε πᾶς ἐπεῖχε βακχῶν· ἦν δὲ πᾶσ᾽ ὁμοῦ βοή, ὁ μὲν στενάζων ὅσον ἐτύγχαν᾽ ἐμπνέων, αἱ δ᾽ ὠλόλυζον. ἔφερε δ᾽ ἡ μὲν ὠλένην, ἡ δ᾽ ἴχνος αὐταῖς ἀρβύλαις, γυμνοῦντο δὲ πλευραὶ σπαραγμοῖς· πᾶσα δ᾽ ᾑματωμένη χεῖρας διεσφαίριζε σάρκα Πενθέως."

more than victimized flesh. The central scene, I suggest, distinguishes between sight and perceptual metamorphosis, by triangulating the gazes of Pentheus, Agave, and Autone. Pentheus looks upward and sees his mother, but she stares back blankly as if mesmerized by the "beast" she has just slain. Indeed, the maenad's perspective is likely shown on the inside of the vessel, as the maenad sees herself seizing a dangerous feline instead of Pentheus' hovering and disarticulated cadaver **[Figure 3.2**]. The leopard, of course, is a zoomorphic form of Dionysus and thus reminds the viewer that the illusion of Pentheus' transformation is ultimately caused by the wine god's visual tricks. When the inebriated banqueter guzzles the brew to exhaustion, his mind is altered, and he sees the hallucinatory zoomorphic imagery on the inside of the bowl that outside observers miss. Moreover, there was likely a performative aspect to this act of drinking (as in other vessels). As viewers grasped the arms of this vessel and pulled it closer to inspect the image of Pentheus, their bodily posture would take on the form of the maenads in the central scene. This act of corporeal mimesis could trigger memories of the Pentheus myth as eyesight slips into mindsight, and the drinker imagines the bestial skins that the maenads hallucinated in myth. All taken together, the main Pentheus scene would have served as a model for seeing and imagining its own imagery, functioning as a "metapicture"; W. J. T. Mitchell defines them as "pictures that refer to themselves or to other pictures, pictures that are used to show what a picture is."[314]

Distant viewing held forth yet another mode of entering the metamorphic imagination **[Figure 3.1-2]**. Like other eyecups, this cup could seem like a mask when

[314] See chapter 2 "Metapictures" in: W. J. T Mitchell, *Picture Theory: [essays on Verbal and Visual Representation]*, 5th ed. (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2005.), esp. 35. Patrick R. Crowley, *The Phantom Image: Seeing the Dead in Ancient Rome* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019), 36.

one held it before the face, as the rest of the company viewed it from some distance—through, I suggest, that in this case, the painter has depicted the "eyes" through abstract rather than mimetic means. Similar to other examples, this "mask" takes the form of a wild boar, with its handles and base envisioning both the ears and snout. And though the "eyes" are roughly in the expected location (between the ears and snout), in this instance, these "eyes" have been abstracted into Dionysiac tendrils that splay out from a central void in a circular pattern, thus evincing that wine god's power has usurped the sense of sight. The visual effect is as if Dionysus coiling-vines have conjured an image of eyes that stare at onlookers with "vertical slit pupils"—a characteristic feature of ambush predators such as felines and foxes, snakes, and crocodiles. The pattern of these eyes is hypnotic. To have crazed eyes while drinking the elixir of Dionysus is to see with the same insanity as Pentheus's mother Agave, whom Euripides writes was "foaming at the mouth and twisting her eyes all about, not thinking as she ought."[315]

The Roman imagination of the Pentheus myth was shaped by Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (c. 8 CE) during the first century CE.[316] Ovid described the rituals of Bacchus as an event where the women "cover their breasts with the skins of beasts."[317] And this may help contextualize why Bacchus disguised the uninitiated Pentheus with a

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[315] *Bacchae* 122-124: "ἡ δ᾽ ἀφρὸν ἐξιεῖσα καὶ διαστρόφους κόρας ἑλίσσουσ᾽, οὐ φρονοῦσ᾽ ἃ χρὴ φρονεῖν, ἐκ Βακχίου κατείχετ᾽..."; Translation found in: Theodore Alois Buckley, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (Dinslaken: André Hoffmann, 2016), line 1124.

[316] Ovid's influence on visual representation during Roman antiquity can be seen here: Peter E. Knox, "Ovidian Myths on Pompeian Walls," in *A Handbook to the Reception of Ovid*, eds. John F. Miller and Carole E. Newlands (Hoboken: Wiley, 2014), 36-54.

[317] *Metamorphoses* 4.6: "...suorum pectora pelle tegi..."

hallucinatory illusion of animal skins. The sparagmos occurs at *Metamorphoses* 3.708-728:

> About midway of [sic] the mountain, bordered with thick woods, was an open plain, free from trees, in full *view* from every side. Here, as Pentheus was spying with profane *eyes* upon the sacred rites, his mother was the first to *see* him, first to rush madly on him, first with hurled thyrsus to smite her son. "Ho, there, my sisters, come!" she cried, "*see* that huge boar prowling in our fields. Now must I rend him." The whole mad throng rush on him; from all sides they come and pursue the frightened wretch—yes, frightened now, and speaking milder words, cursing his folly and confessing that he has sinned. Sore wounded, he cries out: "Oh help, my aunt, Autonoë! Let the ghost of Actaeon move your heart." She knows not who Actaeon is, and tears off the suppliant's right arm; Ino in frenzy rends away his left. And now the wretched man has no arms to stretch out in prayer to his mother; but, *showing* his mangled stumps where his arms have been torn away, he cries: "Oh, mother, *see*!" Agave howls madly at the *sight* and tosses her head with wildly streaming hair. Off she tears his head, and holding it in bloody hands, she yells: "*See*, comrades, this feat spells victory for us! (Italics added) [318]

Ovid's description is replete with visual language, which helps the reader to imagine, or rather, "hallucinate," Pentheus' bestial appearance. Ovid represents this illusion in the reader's mind by evoking the insanity of Agave (*est insano*), followed by her statement, "see that huge boar prowling in our fields (*ille aper, in nostris errat qui maximus agris*)." Agave is also said to "howl," thus indicating the savage, animalistic state of her mind, thus alluding to a philosophy that changing one's perception of things is tantamount to changing the thing itself. As the *sparagmos* begins, Pentheus cries out: "help, my aunt, Autonoë! Let the ghost of Actaeon (*Actaeonis umbrae*) move your heart (*animos*)." Here Ovid tethers together the tales of Actaeon's transformation into a stag and Pentheus'

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[318] *Metamorphoses* 3.708-728: Monte fere medio est, cingentibus ultima silvis, purus ab arboribus, spectabilis undique, campus: hic oculis illum cernentem sacra profanes prima videt, prima est insano concita cursu, prima suum misso violavit Penthea thyrso mater et "o geminae" clamavit "adeste sorores! ille aper, in nostris errat qui maximus agris, ille mihi feriendus aper." ruit omnis in unum turba furens; cunctae coeunt trepidumque sequuntur, iam trepidum, iam verba minus violenta loquentem, iam se damnantem, iam se peccasse fatentem. saucius ille tamen "fer opem, matertera" dixit "Autonoe! moveant animos Actaeonis umbrae!" illa, quis Actaeon, nescit dextramque precanti abstulit, Inoo lacerata est altera raptu. non habet infelix quae matri bracchia tendat, trunca sed ostendens dereptis vulnera membris "adspice, mater!" ait. visis ululavit Agaue collaque iactavit movitque per aera crinem avulsumque caput digitis conplexa cruentis clamat: "io comites, opus hoc victoria nostra est!

transformation into a wild beast (here, a wild boar). Both figures were torn apart on mount Cithaeron; both tales also involve metamorphosis and misperceptions—Acteon's hounds and hunting companions, because they did not discern his soul's identity beneath the skin of a stag—and Pentheus's loved ones, who did not perceive his identity, because it was hidden beneath visionary animal hides.[319] Whether through material or perceptual ruses, the metamorphic powers of the gods disguise identities (Cf. the section in chapter one titled "Seeing Souls in Skins").

The death of Pentheus is depicted in the House of the Vetti at Pompeii **[Figure 3.4]**. Like earlier Greek paintings, the Pompeian image focuses on the relationships between individuals and their interlocking gazes, but it does not depict the final grisly outcome of Bacchus's spell of madness. Michael Koortbojian has observed that Roman art generally reserved the most unsightly, gruesome, and uncouth aspects of myth to the realm of *phantasia* (imagination) so that viewers may censor or fantasize such details according to their desires.[320] Here, with a pitiable expression, Pentheus fixes his gaze on Agave's eyes as if to say: "Oh, mother, *see* [me]!" —to which her own eyes reply with a hypnotic focus on the "beast" that prowls beyond physical sight.[321] Just opposite, Antonoe clutches Pentheus's arm at a cold distance, transfixed by the invisible creature that lurks before her.

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[319] Primary: *Metamorphoses* 3. 134-143, esp. 160-175 (Actaeon), and 511-733 (Pentheus). The link between Pentheus and Actaeon is noted in P. M. C Forbes Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 87, 89, 198.

[320] Michael Koortbojian, "Mimesis or Phantasia? Two Representational Modes in Roman Commemorative Art," Classical Antiquity 2 (2005): 285-306, esp. 286.

[321] These are Pentheus' words per Ovid. See the sparagmos block quote cited earlier.

More broadly, the visual context of this room's paintings conveys ideas that relate to animality and violence and may even allude to Pentheus' perceptual metamorphosis into a wild beast.[322] On opposite walls, the Pentheus scene is flanked by images of Hercules strangling serpents (left) and the torture of Dirce (right; **[Figure 3.5-6]**). Both scenes depict protagonists whose bodies are covered in animality: Hercules clutches at serpents that writhe all over his skin, while a huge bull overshadows (and soon will trample) Dirce's body. Yet the outcomes of these myths are diametrically opposed, as the mythically minded viewer recalls that Dirce's body is destroyed (like Pentheus), but Hercules strangles the life out of the serpents. Animals, then, can be both the subjects and objects of torture. One other detail is especially interesting. Note how the gaze and posture of the man (either Zethos or Amphion) who clutches Dirce's arm mirror the form of the maenad (right) who seizes Pentheus **[Figures 3.4-5]**. In the Dirce panel, the fact that this man's hands grasp *both* human and animal forms may be significant: providing formal prototypes that made the process of imagining Pentheus' untamed bestial hallucination all the more likely. Not only did these acts of "seizing" help viewers to see (the hallucinatory) double, but the linguistically savvy may have likewise sensed a double meaning that was also implicated in the mythology; for the Greek and Latin terms meaning "to seize" (e.g. "ἁρπάζω," "*apprehendo,*" "*prehendo*") can also mean to "grasp

[322] Again, the bibliography related to this scene largely eschews questions about the artistic representation of mania. In one study, stylistic analysis is applied to the Pentheus myth, and the images are used as textual illustrations: De Carolis, *Gods and Heroes in Pompeii*, 21-22, 45. One textual study of mania is useful, but its descriptions of images are brief and limited to formalism: Ustinova, *Divine Mania*,174-178; more stylistic analysis is found in Ling, *Roman Painting*, 78, 125,176. Another approach reduces scenes of Bacchic madness to simply the display of high culture: Ling, "The Arts of Living" 316. Even studies that focus exclusively on the representation of Dionysiac art at Pompeii may bypass any mention of Bacchic mania and the irrational: Shelley Hales, "Dionysos at Pompeii," 335-341.

with the mind."[323] Depictions of hallucinatory metamorphosis thus shift the work of representation to the medium of memory and imagination (φαντασία), enticing viewers to "see" as those who have fallen under the spell of the wine god's madness.

Metamorphosis and the Madness of "Bloodthirsty" Lycurgus

Ancient authors frequently likened the doom of Pentheus to Lycurgus, another king who persecuted the cult of Bacchus. "Pentheus thou didst destroy," writes Ovid, "thou awful god [Bacchus], and Lycurgus, armed with the two-edged battle-axe, impious were they both." And Diodorus Siculus (1st century BCE) categorized Pentheus and Lycurgus together as most renowned for their impiety against the wine god. We also learn from Pausanias that the temple of Dionysus in Athens contained paintings of Pentheus and Lycurgus, which were set up next to each other, showing Dionysus' retribution against them.[324] During late antiquity, textual descriptions of the myth increasingly expanded and became more detailed. The most detailed narratives are found in the massive Greek epic poem, the *Dionysiaca*, which was probably written in the fourth or fifth century by the Christian author Nonnus, as well as one anonymous Greek papyrus dating to the third century AD.[325]

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[323] Liddell and Scott, s.v. "ἁρπάζω" (see 1891 edition); Lewis and Short, s.v. "*apprehendo,*" "*prehendo*."

[324] Ovid: *Metamorphoses* 4. 22-23: "Penthea tu, venerande, bipenniferumque Lycurgum sacrilegos mactas";*Diodorus of Sicily* 3.4: "τῶν δὲ κολασθέντων ὑπ᾽ αὐτοῦ φασιν ἐπιφανεστάτους εἶναι Πενθέα μὲν παρὰ τοῖς Ἕλλησι, Μύρρανον δὲ τὸν βασιλέα παρ᾽ Ἰνδοῖς, Λυκοῦργον δὲ παρὰ τοῖς Θρᾳξί." ("Among those who were punished by him, the most renowned, they say, were Pentheus among the Greeks, Myrrhanus the king of the Indians, and Lycurgus among the Thracians."); Pausanias, *Description of Greece, Attica* 20.3: "ταῦτά τε δὴ γεγραμμένα εἰσὶ καὶ Πενθεὺς καὶ Λυκοῦργος ὧν ἐς Διόνυσον ὕβρισαν διδόντες δίκας, Ἀριάδνη δὲ καθεύδουσα καὶ Θησεὺς ἀναγόμενος καὶ Διόνυσος ἥκων ἐς τῆς Ἀριάδνης τὴν ἁρπαγήν." ("Besides this picture there are also represented Pentheus and Lycurgus paying the penalty of their insolence to Dionysus, Ariadne asleep, Theseus putting out to sea, and Dionysus on his arrival to carry off Ariadne.").

Perhaps the most astonishing artistic representation of the Lycurgus myth to survive from Late Antiquity is the Lycurgus cup (c. 300-400 CE), an object which finds its closest parallel texts in Nonnus's *Dionysiaca* and the anonymous Greek papyrus **[Figures 3.9-112]**. [326]Although numerous scholars have studied the Lycurgus cup, the theme of mythic metamorphosis has actually only been mentioned in passing, and its representation of madness has not been explored at all. Modern rationalist approaches have instead dominated the scholarship: scientific investigations of the material properties of dichroic glass, fierce debates over whether the glass relief was carved or molded, cultural studies that approximate its materiality to rocks and gems, and the standard iconographic investigations.[327] All contribute to its understanding, but the cup's embodiment of alcoholic rage and uncanny metamorphic phenomena elude them.

It has been posited that the Lycurgus cup was likely viewed at symposia, though we cannot be sure precisely what location such events took place. Still, floor mosaics

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[325] Anonymous, Fragments of Dionysus, translation by Denys Lionel *Select papyri III* (Loeb Classical Library 1941) 523; Nonnos, *Dionysiaca, Volume II: Books 16-35,* translated by W. H. D. Rouse (Loeb Classical Library), 128-157.

[326] For contemporary primary sources of the Lycurgus myth, see Anonymous, Fragments of Dionysus, translation by Denys Lionel Select papyri III (Loeb Classical Library 1941) 523; Nonnos, *Dionysiaca*, Volume II: Books 16-35, translated by W. H. D. Rouse (Loeb Classical Library), 128-157.

[327] Donald Benjamin Harden and Jocelyn M. C. Toynbee, "The Rothschild Lycurgus Cup" *Archaeologia or Miscellaneous Tracts Relating to Antiquity* (1959): 179-212 esp. 192-193, 199; Ian Freestone et al., *The Lycurgus Cup - A Roman Nanotechnology*, *Gold Bulletin*, 4(2007): 275; David Whitehouse and William Gudenrath, "A Fragment of a Dichroic Cage Cup in the British Museum" *Journal of Glass Studies* 51 (2009): 224-227 esp. 226; See discussion and bibliography: Manus Ranjan Gartia et al., "Colorimetric Plasmon Resonance Imaging Using Nano Lycurgus Cup Arrays" *Advanced Optical Materials.* 1 (2013): 68 and notes 2-5; for cold process, see bibliography in Whitehouse and Gudenwrath, "A Fragment of a Dichroic Cage Cup," 225 and notes. For heated method, see Rosemarie Lierke, "On the Manufacture of Diatreta and Cage Cups from the Pharos Beaker to the Lycurgus Cup" in eds. Entwistle, Christopher, and Liz James. *New Light on Old Glass: Recent Research on Byzantine Mosaics and Glass* (London: British Museum, 2013) 89-102. This article should be supplemented by her online defense, where she grapples with the most thorny questions: http://www.rosemarie-lierke.de/English/Cage_Cups/cage_cups.html; Jas' Elsner, "The Lycurgus Cup" in *New Light on Old Glass: Recent Research on Byzantine Mosaics and Glass* eds. Christopher Entwistle and Liz James (London: British Museum, 2013), 107 plus relevant bibliography.

from across the Mediterranean (ranging from Turkey to France) can help us better imagine potential pictorial environments, which depict Lycurgus' body shackled by vines. Like the Lycurgus cup, a French mosaic from the Musée Gallo-Romain envisions Lycurgus set against a verdant ground, though here, the vine takes a colossal form that engulfs the puny king in its vengeful coils **[Figure 3.8]**.[328] In a similar setting, this cup likely intoxicated pagan elites as much with its imagery and metamorphic material as the wine it held **[Figures 3.9, 11]**. It depicts the myth of the "bloodthirsty ruffian, the ferocious Lycurgus," who went insane and attacked the followers of the wine god Bacchus with an ax.[329] As she cried out for help, Bacchus transformed her into a grapevine whose coiling tendrils stifled her persecutor. As in Nonnus's description, we see Ambrosia "whipping Lycurgus with her long foliage; and the wild man [was] caught in the fresh green bonds, immovable, smothered all round in the galling fetters of leaves which he could not tear."[330] To turn the cup is "to turn" Ambrosia into the vine. Here the wordplay "turn" is ancient since στρέφω and *verto* can mean to rotate, change, transform, or even transmute substance.[331] Indeed, when the cup is held up to the light, the dichroic glass also "ripens" from green to red like a grape under the sun **[Figures 3.9, 11]**.

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[328] For its likely sympotic context, see Jas' Elsner, "The Lycurgus Cup" in *New Light on Old Glass: Recent Research on Byzantine Mosaics and Glass* eds. Christopher Entwistle and Liz James (London: British Museum, 2013), 103-111, esp. 105-107. For visual *comparanda* see *LIMC* s.v. "Lykurgos"

[329] *Dionysiaca* 20.149-152:"Ἔνθά τις, Ἄρεος αἷμα, μιαιφόνος ᾤκεεν ἀνήρ,ἤθεσι ῥιγεδανοῖσιν ἔχων μίμημα τοκῆος, ὀθνείους ἀθέμιστος ἀμεμφέας εἰς μόρον ἕλκων, αἰνομανὴς Λυκόοργος·" ("There lived a bloodthirsty ruffian, the ferocious Lycurgos, a son of Ares and like his father in his own horrid customs.")

[330] Full quote: *Dionysiaca* 21.53-57: "Τοῖα μὲν ἀμπελόεσσα κορυμβοφόρῳ φάτο φωνῇ Ἀμβροσίη τανύφυλλος, ἀρασσομένοιο Λυκούργου· καὶ χλοεροῖς δεσμοῖσι κατάσχετος ἄγριος ἀνὴρ ἀρραγέων ἀτίνακτος ἀλυκτοπέδῃσι πετήλων ἀμφιπαγὴς ἀλάλαζεν ἀπειλείων Διονύσῳ·" ("So cried Ambrosia out of the vine with her grapy voice, whipping Lycurgos with her long foliage; and the wild man caught in the fresh green bonds, immovable, smothered all round in the galling fetters of leaves which he could not tear, roared defiance against Dionysos.")

[331] Liddell and Scott, s.v. "στρέφω"; Lewis and Short, s.v. "*verto,*" cf. "*converto*"

The myth goes on to tell us that Lycurgus saw phantasmagoric hallucinations of serpents counterfeiting the interweaving with human bodies around him. Slashing at serpents, he slew his wife and two sons (or alternatively, axed his own foot, bathing his body in blood).[332] The forensic eye will notice the hacked foot **[Figure 3.10]**, the cultured one that his vine-shackled body mirrors the writhing of snake-entangled Laocoön, or even Hercules **[Figures 3.6-7]**. The viewer "sees double," discerning human bodies (and classical prototypes) but knowing that Lycurgus hallucinates invisible serpents. The seasoned drinker will recall the phantasms of alcoholism, the serpents (or other vermin) that seem to crawl over the skin in *delirium tremens*.[333] It is as if Lycurgus cries out: "Loose these phantasms, this cunning witchery of bonds!" ("λύσατε φάσματα ταῦτα καὶ αἰόλα μάγγανα δεσμῶν·").[334] As the banqueters passed the cup and drained it, they bled the "bloodthirsty" king dry, and the dregs became clots until his form dissolved into a Shade **[Figure 3.12]**. And indeed, the term "shade" (Greek σκιά; Latin *umbra*) imagined a range of natural, supernatural, and artistic meanings, including a "phantom" of the dead, casting a "shadow," "the dark part" of a painting, or even an "image" or "reflection" in a bowl.[335] It is a fitting end for a king whose flesh was torn by vines until it became a mass of "red bleeding weals" and to whom devotees are said to have offered "libations of blood."[336]

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[332] The anonymous papyrus recounts Lycurgus killing his family *in Select Papyri. Poetry. Hexameter Poems, Anonymous* 35-54. Pseudo-Hyginus recounts that Lycurgus axed his foot: Julius Hyginus, *The Myths of Hyginus*, trans. Mary A. Grant (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1960), fabulae 132, commentary 110.

[333] James Root, *The Horrors of Delirium Tremens* (New York: J. Adams, 1844), 87-88.

[334] *Dionysiaca* 21.141

[335] Lewis and Short, s.v. *umbra*; Liddell and Scott, s.v. σκιά

Material Metamorphosis Before the Lycurgus Cup

Before the invention of dichroic (color-changing) glass in late antiquity, artists wrought cups in semiprecious stone that presaged the Lycurgus cup. Indeed, while the Hellenistic and Roman imperial eras witnessed the linguistic birth of the term metamorphosis, visual artists increasingly fashioned objects that were not simply pictorial representations of metamorphosis but explored the relationship between metamorphosis and materials that enchanted the mind. An example is the Farnese Cup **[Figure 3.17]**. So far, iconography and questions about its historical provenance have dominated the debates regarding this object. Most scholars have located its imagery within the environment of Hellenistic Alexandria, though it has also been posited that this object might have been a production of Imperial Rome.[337] Yet equally as important is this cup's material effects **[Figures 3.17-18]**. This vessel — a massive cameo wrought from sardonyx agate — conjures an eerie vision of Medusa, whose countenance fluctuates according to variable lighting conditions. As banqueters likely examined this vessel with candles during the nighttime symposia, the light would have poured through its wavy

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[336] *Dionysiaca* 21.77-79: "καὶ ἀμπελόεσσα Γιγαρτὼ εὐπετάλῳ μάστιγι δέμας φοίνιξε Λυκούργου αἱμαλέῃ σμώδιγγι χαρασσομένων ἐπὶ νώτων·" ("and Gigarto of the vines, with the whip of twigs, scored the body of Lycurgos with red bleeding weals over the torn shoulders."). *Dionysiaca* 21.158-161: "Ἄραβες δὲ πολυκνίσων ἐπὶ βωμῶν, ὡς θεόν, υἷα Δρύαντος ἐμειλίξαντο θυηλαῖς,ἀντὶ Διωνύσοιο μελιρραθάμιγγος ὀπώρης λύθρον ἐπισπένδοντες ἀβακχεύτῳ Λυκοόργῳ." ("For the Arabs on heavy-steaming altars propitiated Dryas' son as a god with offerings, pouring to Lycurgos, who cared naught for Bacchos, libations of blood, instead of the honeydripping vintage of Dionysos.")

[337] The state of the field tends to debate iconographic meaning as a means to ascertain the date of the cup, with most scholars arguing it is Ptolemaic in origin and others that it is Roman. As cases in point, see the arguments made by Dwyer and Pollini. For instance, one article argues that the vessel's iconography is a temporal allegory of the planets and zodiac that fits within the Ptolemaic court: Eugene J. Dwyer, "The Temporal Allegory of the Tazza Farnese," *American Journal of Archaeology* 96 (1992): 255-282. Elsewhere, the argument is made that the cup is not Ptolemaic but made during the era of Augustus, used in sacrifices, and magically invited Augustus' new age: John Pollini, "The Tazza Farnese: Augusto Imperatore 'Redeunt Saturnia Regna!,'" *American Journal of Archaeology* (1992): 283-300. For a lengthier state of the field, consult relevant bibliographies in these respective sources.

relief, causing the Gorgon's gaze to glow; the surface would seem to liquefy, dissolve, and leave streaks like blood in a pool of water, as if Medusa's head had been freshly cut. Had viewers been attentive to this vessel's material workings, they likely would have been "petrified" in place by this bloodthirsty vision of the Gorgon's gaze at the bottom of their cup.

Lastly, consider one final cup that displays material transformations and Bacchic imagery. The Barber Cup is a vessel that preceded the Lycurgus cup by at least two hundred years **[Figures 3.13-15]**. Like the Lycurgus cup, the Barber cup displays Bacchic imagery such as grapevines and a Silenus whose head upholds a vine handle much like a caryatid. When transmitted light strikes its surface, it intimates the ripening of a grapevine by emphasizing the contrast between its bitter green hues and sweet concord colors **[Figure 3.14]**. Moreover, the entangling vines, heavy with grape clusters, seem to emerge from the base of the vessel, whose veining is earthy and elemental.

One overlooked visual detail is worth mentioning by way of transition. Consider Silenus' head. An artist clearly has carved it, yet the fluorspar veining seems to trace out the forms of shoulders (especially on the viewer's left side **[Figure 3.15]**). Such veining conjures in the mind's eye the form of a "bust" that fits the sculpted face. This body of stone, moreover, is manifest in hues that double as fleshy or earthy, as if flesh can come from the earth, or earth can become flesh. Writing roughly contemporary to the cup, Pliny the Elder writes about a peculiar legend: "As for the quarries of Paros, there is an extraordinary (*mirabilis*) tradition that once, when the stone-breakers split a single block with their wedges, a likeness (*imago*) of Silenus was found inside."[338] For Pliny, such a

[338] *Natural History* 36.13-14: "sed in Pariorum mirabile proditur, glaeba lapidis unius cuneis dividentium soluta, imaginem Sileni intus extitisse." Commentary: Platt, "Of Sponges and Stones: Matter and Ornament

marble-Silenus could be described as an "image" (*imago*) that pertained to a tradition that was *mirabilis*, a capacious term meaning "wonderful, marvelous, strange, singular, glorious, and miraculous."[339] The Barber cup thus summons a vision of artistry that has emerged as a wonder rather than purely the product of human hands. Although this image of a stone Silenus is likely too distant from current sensibilities to create the affective responses Pliny describes, perhaps one can conjure its unsettling strangeness by likening it to a modern icon of petrification—Han Solo's metamorphic imprisonment in Carbonite **[Figure 3.16]**. Both images petrify the viewer in place by the thought of what it might be like to be eternally immobilized. In the end, the sentiments evoked by this chance-Silenus-imagery subtly heighten the cup's affinities with the unpredictable world of Bacchus' enchantments. How accidental imagery relates to Greco-Roman musings about metamorphosis is the subject we will now explore in detail.

"Seeing" Faces and Forms: Sculptural Pareidolia and the Enchantment of Landscape

Pareidolia (Greek παρα "alongside" + εἴδωλον "image") is the term used by psychologists to describe the way the human brain naturally tends to discern "faces" or other "bodily forms" from random patterns, stones, trees, clouds, or even the moon **[Figure 3.19]**. Ancient sources were also aware of pareidolic illusions. In recent years many art historical studies have examined the relationship between pareidolia and visual art during antiquity and the Middle Ages. John Onians has argued that Roman rhetorical education trained viewers to "amplify" or imagine figures in the abstract patterns of

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in Roman Painting," in Ornament and Figure in Graeco-Roman Art: Rethinking Visual Ontologies in Classical Antiquity, ed. Nikolaus Dietrich and Michael Squire (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 241-78, esp. 258.

[339] Lewis and Short, s.v. *mirabilis*; cf. Liddell and Scott, s.v. θαῦμα.

marble veining that exceeded the information available to the physical senses, especially during Late Antiquity. Fabio Barry has uncovered the long durée of the interesting history of the Plinian ideal of "painting in stone." From a painted "face" in a faux-marble dado in the House of the Golden Cupids to the many anthropomorphic figures in Byzantine book-matched marbles, to the paintings of "faces" in medieval columns—artists imagined that Mother Nature (or the Creator) had wondrously fashioned images without the intervention of human hands.[340] Subsequent scholarship has mined further examples of marble patterns (or faux imitations) that exemplify this trend towards abstraction and imaginative spectatorship during late antiquity and the Middle Ages.[341] More broadly, Brooke Holmes and Verity Platt have argued persuasively that the boundaries between "Nature" and "Culture" were much more porous in Greco-Roman antiquity than the Early Modern categorizations we have inherited. For Platt, such worldviews were especially critical to stoics—or those who eclectically drew upon stoic philosophy (e.g., Pliny)—as rationality permeated the forms of the natural world. Thus, the random images that the natural world produced were not mimetic likenesses but images that intelligently materialized the signifier and the signified in a single model.[342]

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[340] John Onians, "Abstraction and Imagination in Late Antiquity," Art History 3 (1980): 1-24, esp. 9-11, 16; Fabio Barry, "'Painting in Stone': Early Modern Experiments in a Metamedium," *The Art Bulletin* 99 (2017): 30-61; Fabio Barry, *Painting in Stone: Architecture and the Poetics of Marble from Antiquity to the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 80-103, 302, 332, 335.

[341] John Mitchell, "Believing is Seeing: The Natural Image in Late Antiquity," in *Architecture and Interpretation: Essays for Eric Fernie*, ed. Jill A. Franklin, T. A. Heslop, and Christine Stevenson (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 16-41, esp. figs. 4, 11-13; Bente Kiilerich, "Abstraction in Late Antique Art," in *Envisioning Worlds in Late Antique Art: New Perspectives on Abstraction and Symbolism in Late-Roman and Early-Byzantine Visual Culture (c. 300-600)*, ed. Cecilia Olovsdotter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 78-94.

[342] Brooke Holmes, "Foreword: Before Nature?," in *Ecocriticism, Ecology, and the Cultures of Antiquity*, ed. Christopher Schliephake (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), ix-xii; Verity Platt, "Ecology, Ethics, and Aesthetics in Pliny's the Elder's Natural History," in *Ecologies, Agents, Terrains*, ed. Christopher P. Heuer and Rebecca Zorach, Clark Studies in the Visual Arts (Williamstown, MA: Clark Art Institute,

While such studies have been illuminating, they have focused almost exclusively on the "artistic" patterns in marble veining or its painted imitations. Moreover, more recent studies that have examined pareidolia in the Greco-Roman imagination are heavily weighted toward ancient rationalizing sources, particularly Pliny the Elder.[343] As we have seen in chapter two, the hallmarks of ancient rationalism include a rejection of the miraculous, anthropocentrism, trust in how the natural world works in the present instead of mythical tradition, general trust in human reason over the senses, and a desire to prevent natural categories from being violated (e.g., species-crossing, hybrids, petrifications). In this section of chapter three, I wish to shift the discussion of pareidolia in two ways: first, by exploring sculptural pareidolia and ephemera, including natural rock formations, tree bark, and the echoes that haunted the natural world; second, by focusing on classical interpretations that imagine pareidolic illusions as metamorphoses that enchanted the natural landscape, and in so doing offended ancient rationalist sensibilities.

Modern travelers are increasingly documenting the presence of pareidolia across the stonescapes of the Mediterranean and North Africa. In Sardinia tourists wonder at the so-called "sphinxes." One appears to wear a necklace, eyes flaring, mouth gaping open as if calling forth some tormented shriek **[Figure 3.19]**. Another stands as a sentinel, casting an unyielding frown upon any onlookers that venture up the mountain **[Figure 3.20]**. Adventurers also discern bestial bodies in stone. At the well-known Elephantine Island, a

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2018), 219-42, esp. 220, 232, 230; Verity Platt, "Of Sponges and Stones: Matter and Ornament in Roman Painting," in *Ornament and Figure in Graeco-Roman Art: Rethinking Visual Ontologies in Classical Antiquity*, ed. Nikolaus Dietrich and Michael Squire (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 241-78, 246-47, 263-264.

[343] For the relationship between chance-representation and rationality in Greco-Roman antiquity, see Platt, "Of Sponges and Stones," 246, 249, 251, 254, 258; Platt, "Ecology, Ethics, and Aesthetics," 233-234.

crowd of stone elephants appears to draw water from the Nile. At Sardinia an elephant ("La roccia dell'Elefante") turns its head and waves its trunk in the air like a banner **[Figure 3.22]**. In the Sahara Desert another stone elephant is less jubilant **[Figure 3.23**]. Its feet stick to the sandstone, and its heavy head merely hangs, resigned to its unyielding doom, one long bereft of herd or caravan. The Algerian desert is also haunted by what appears to be huge wild boar prowling upon a hilltop **[Figure 3.24]**. Often viewers discern pareidolia next to rocky coasts and their nearby hills, where winds and waves have eroded their forms into fanciful patterns. At Sardenia a colossal "bear" (the well-known "Roccia dell'Orso") hulks over the coast **[Figures 3.25-26]**. At La Maddalena Archipelago, yet another "bear" sits on a windswept hilltop and overlooks the sea.[344] And at Santorini, Greece, ships sail beneath the gaze of a stone face that overlooks the sea **[Figure 3.21]**.

As ancient Greek and Roman seafarers and travelers explored such regions, they likewise made meaning out of the "faces" and "forms" of the natural world. From the time of Homer, such forms were mythologized as strange petrifications.[345] Yet it was Ovid who would offer the most extensive archive of pareidolic descriptions from the Mediterranean and Africa. Although it is well-known that Ovid's *Metamorphoses* captures a treasure chest of cultural aetiologies, it has escaped notice that a host of his

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[344] I have only been able to find this image on two websites: Madeline Jhawar, "Isola Maddalena, date is written unknown, accessed September 1, 2021, https://italybeyondtheobvious.com/isola-maddalena-sardinia/
Staff at Beyond Science, "Real Animal-Shaped Rocks Sculpted by Nature," November 15, 2017, accessed September 1, 2021, https://michael-chen-mg2n.squarespace.com/news/2017/11/15/23-bizarre-animal-shaped-rocks-sculpted-by-nature

[345] See especially the discussion and notes for the mountains Rhodope and Sipylus below.

aetiological descriptions refer to natural pareidolia.[346] What could explain these strange "faces" and "forms" that viewers saw in the landscape? According to Ovid, there was a widespread belief (e.g., among peasants, priests, sailors, and "old tradition") that such pareidolia had mythological origins, which were often metamorphic. Among these, there are numerous accounts of petrifications. When Hercules, for instance, hurled Lichas into the air, "his vital moisture dried, he changed, old tradition says, to flinty rock." Apparently, the monument was well known. "*Even to this day*," Ovid writes, "in the Euboean sea a low rock rises from the waves, keeping the semblance of a human form; this rock, as if it were sentient, the sailors fear to tread on, and they call it Lichas."[347] In another myth, Ino's companions, thinking she had hurled herself off a rocky cliff, ran to the scene, and fearing the worst, they petrified in agonizing poses that overlooked the sea.[348] Scylla's transformation on a rocky cliff is similar to that of Lichas. "She also would have wrecked the Trojan ships had she not before their coming been changed into a rock *which stands there to this day*. The rock also is the sailors' dread."[349] It seems that as sailors navigated past rocky coasts in the Mediterranean Sea, they often imagined coastal rocks to be haunted by the remains of petrified humans and monsters. Yet other myths describe how animals (e.g., snakes, wolves), entire mountain ranges (Atlas, Rhodope), or islands (Perimele), were the result of metamorphoses.[350] When Perseus

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[346] For Ovid and aetiology see Karen S. Myers, *Ovid's Causes: Cosmogony and Aetiology in the Metamorphoses*, 4th ed. (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1997), 1-26, 61-132.

[347] For Lichas see: *Metamorphoses* 9.224-229: "...umoris habentem in rigidos versum silices prior edidit aetas. nunc quoque in Euboico scopulus brevis eminet alto gurgite et humanae servat vestigia formae, quem, quasi sensurum, nautae calcare verentur, appellantque Lichan."

[348] The tales of Athamas and Ino are found in *Metamorphoses* 4. 416–562.

[349] *Metamorphoses* 14.72-74: "mox eadem Teucras fuerat mersura carinas, ni prius in scopulum, qui nunc quoque saxeus exstat, transformata foret: scopulum quoque navita vitat."

sneaks into Medusa's lair, Ovid's description envisions a landscape enchanted with the petrified bodies of beasts and men:

> Perseus stole away, and travelling far through trackless and secret ways, rough woods, and bristling rocks, he came at last to where the Gorgons lived. On all sides through the fields and along the ways he saw the forms of men and beasts changed into stone by one look at Medusa's face.[351]

Ovid's description prompts the reader to imagine petrification occurring in remote or hidden regions where civilization has not yet disenchanted the natural world. The imagery of stone animals also implies that petrifications might occur through chance encounters with the Gorgon's gaze, just as accidental contact with the blood that dripped from her severed head might cause yet other petrifications—for example, in the aetiology of the sea corals stony nature ("And even till this day the same nature has remained in coral so that they harden when exposed to air, and what was a pliant twig beneath the sea is turned to stone above").[352]

Not every pareidolic statue was entirely fashioned by nature. As ancient Greek and Roman travelers explored the landscape, they encountered the stone monuments of long-distant civilizations, including statues that were carved into the mountain's natural "face." In 2016, Miroslav Chobanov, a young photographer, rediscovered one such face by accident while climbing at Eagle's Rocks at Mount Rhodope in modern southern Bulgaria (ancient Thrace; **[Figure 3.27]**. Using a climbing rope, he scaled about 40

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[350] Among others, one can find the following petrifications in the *Metamorphoses*: Atlas (4.621-662), Rhodope (6.87-89), Perimele (8.547–610), a snake (9.58-60), and a wolf (11.346-409).

[351] *Metamorphoses* 4.777-781: "perque abdita longe deviaque et silvis horrentia saxa fragosis Gorgoneas tetigisse domos passimque per agros perque vias vidisse hominum simulacra ferarumque in silicem ex ipsis visa conversa Medusa."

[352] *Metamorphoses*, 4.750-752. "nunc quoque curaliis eadem natura remansit, duritiam tacto capiant ut ab aere quodque vimen in aequore erat, fiat super aequora saxum."

meters up Eagle's Rocks when he suddenly noticed a colossal face in the natural rock. Uncertain whether this was a natural formation or human hands carved it, he contacted archeologists Ana Raduncheva and Prof. Stefanka Ivanova (National Institute and Museum of Archaeology of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences). As the archeologists investigated the area, they discovered two other stone faces (one male and one female), and what they call a "sacrificial altar" carved into the nearby stone. Raduncheva and Ivanova have identified that humans carved these stone faces during the Chalcolithic period (c. 3500 BCE and 3000 BCE), but the area was also used in Greco-Roman times. Extensive human labor went into the carvings, each of which is about ten meters in height and rises thirty to forty meters above the earth.[353] Across the rocky chasm, one can see two faces that seem to look longingly into each other's eyes as they tilt toward one another, whether by way of greeting or a kiss, we cannot know **[Figure 3.27**].

When news of the discovery reached the press, journalists began converging on the region (Sarnitsa, Bulgaria). Some even claimed that their drone footage of the surrounding forest had captured images of yet other monumental carvings, this time in the shape of giant snakes. In Raduncheva assessment, prehistoric people did indeed carve these serpentine images into the rocky pillars that naturally rise from the landscape. In one example, one may intuit the serpentine form: its diamond-scull rises above the tree line, its stout body stretches upward, and here, the artist carved horizontal lines across the

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[353] Ivan Dikov, "5,000-Year-Old Prehistoric Rock Shrine with Huge Human Faces Hewn in Discovered in Bulgaria's Rhodope Mountains," Chinese Institute of Archaeology, April 1, 2016, accessed December 1, 2021, http://www.kaogu.net.cn/en/International_exchange/Academic_activities___/2016/0401/53472.html; Mark Miller, "Giant Face-like Rock Formations and a Rock Shrine Found in Bulgaria," ancient-origins.net, April 1, 2016, accessed December 1, 2021, https://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/giant-face-rock-formations-and-rock-shrine-found-bulgaria-005638

rock that seem to envision ventral scales or the armored pattern along a serpent's underbelly. [354] As a whole, the scene conjures in the imagination the imagery of a colossal snake scoping out its environment from the cover of the undergrowth.

While the initial archaeological reports have focused on the discovery of the stone carvings and their prehistoric context, the reports have yet to discuss how these sites were imagined in Greco-Roman times. As it turns out, by the age of Ovid, myth upon myth had layered upon the Rhodope landscape, suffusing it with an extraordinary sense of enchantment and even dread. Indeed, the mountain's modern name owes its origin to a tale about petrification, in which the queen and king of Thrace, Rhodope, and Haemus, offended the gods for assuming divine honors, who metamorphosed their bodies into the shapes of the very mountains.[355] This strange and wonderful landscape sparked the minds of poets, whose tales envisioned the Rhodope mountains as a place where the mind might go insane. Here Thracian women traditionally lost their logical powers while in the throes of Bacchic rites. This landscape prompted Procne—under a spell of Bacchic madness and seeking to avenge Philomela's rape—to turn toward infanticide and prepare a grizzly meal for her unfaithful husband, Tereus. Then when Tereus sought to slay Procne, both

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[354] For multiple images, see: Ivan Dikov, "Prehistoric rock shrine with giant snakeheads hewn-in discovered near Bulgaria's Sarnitsa archaeologist confirms," archaeologyinbulgaria.com, March 8, 2016, accessed December 1, 2021, http://archaeologyinbulgaria.com/2016/08/03/prehistoric-rock-shrine-with-giant-snake-heads-hewn-in-discovered-near-bulgarias-sarnitsa-archaeologist-confirms/

[355] Ovid describes Rhodope and Haemus in his telling of Minerva's weaving during her contest with Arachne. *Metamorphoses* 6.87-89: "Threiciam Rhodopen habet angulus unus et Haemum, nunc gelidos montes, mortalia corpora quondam, nomina summorum sibi qui tribuere deorum." ("One corner shows Thracian Rhodope and Haemus, now huge, bleak mountains, but once audacious mortals who dared assume the names of the most high gods."). For commentary, see H. David Bramble, "Haemus and Rhodope," in *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: A Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings,* by H. David Brumble (Westport (Conn.): Greenwood Press, 1998).

were magically transformed into birds.[356] In the Ovidian imagination, it was at mount Rhodope that crazed maenads dismembered the body of Orpheus. But before this occurred, the magic of Orpheus' tunes charmed the natural world, as stones, animals, rivers, and trees were magnetized to his presence. Amid these walking-animate trees, Ovid mentions the presence of Cyparissus, a tree that was once a boy. Such trees (like the reader) have come to hear tales of transformation as Orpheus sings a spellbinding list of metamorphic myths—Ganymede (into an eagle), Hyacinthus (into a flower), the Cerastae (into bulls), Propoetides (petrification), Pygmalion (stone into flesh), Myrrha (into a tree), Adonis (into a flower), Atlanta and Hippomenes (lions)—each of which prompts the reader to wonder just how many of Nature's forms, at Rhodope, might also be ensouled with human minds. After the song concludes, and the maenads have dismembered the bard, Ovid adds the final coda—the gleeman's tragic head floats downstream to Lesbos, and is bitten by a snake, which the wrathful Apollo petrifies as a reprisal.[357]

The mountains of Rhodope may very well be some of the most enchanted Ovid describes. Here the enchantment of the landscape is occasioned through the reciprocity of natural forms and human activity. The pareidolic proclivities of prehistoric humans caused them to see artistic potential in boulders, motivating artists to rework them into a gallery of faces and animal forms. In subsequent centuries poets responded by making

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[356] For the Procne myth see *Metamorphoses* 6.587-674.

[357] Ovid's treatment of Orpheus is quite lengthy. For Orpheus' life and song, see *Metamorphoses* 10. 1-707. For Orpheus' death and the transformation of the serpent into stone, see *Metamorphoses* 11.1-84. In Ovid's telling, the serpent bite occurs when Orpheus's head floats downstream from Rhodope to the shores of Lesbos. *Metamorphoses* 9. 56-60: "hic ferus expositum peregrinis anguis harenis os petit et sparsos stillanti rore capillos. tandem Phoebus adest morsusque inferre parantem arcet et in lapidem rictus serpentis apertos congelat et patulos, ut erant, indurat hiatus." ("Here, as the head lay exposed upon a foreign strand, a savage serpent attacked it and its streaming locks still dripping with the spray. But Phoebus at last appeared, drove off the snake just in the act to bite, and hardened and froze to stone, just as they were, the serpent's widespread, yawning jaws.").

new myths, which in turn increased the likelihood that viewers would "see" yet other pareidolic illusions. By the era of Ovid, poetic musings intuited magic and metamorphic potential in the birds that flitted about the forest and in the very trees as they swayed in the wind.

Of course, the belief that pareidolic imagery was the result of supernatural transformations was not shared by ancient rationalists. As discussed in the previous chapter, Lucretius rationalized metamorphosis through optics: observing how the images that sped toward the eyes became distorted as they traveled through the air, especially when the viewer contemplated objects at a great distance. He applied similar logic to pareidolia. Clouds, for instance, seemed quintessentially metamorphic and pareidolic, as "they never cease to dissolve and change their shapes and turn themselves into the outlines of figures of every kind." The eyes thus glimpsed a fantastical world of flying giants, great mountains, and monstrous forms.[358] "Now [let me tell you],” Lucretius continues, “how easily and quickly these images arise, constantly flowing off from things and gliding away. For there is always something streaming from the outermost surface of things for them to shoot off." [359] The intromission theory of vision thus provided a scientific rational for pareidolic illusions, ascribing their fantastical forms to the constant flow of images from objects and the ever-shapeshifting possibilities of air and atmosphere.

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[358] *De Rerum Natura* 4.141-142: "nec speciem mutare suam liquentia cessant et cuiusque modi formarum vertere in oras."

[359] *De Rerum Natura* 4.143-146 "Nunc ea quam facili et celeri ratione genantur perpetuoque fluant ab rebus lapsaque cedant..... semper enim summum quicquid de rebus abundant quod iaculentur."

The imagistic landscape of Mount Sipylus (now the Aegean side of Turkey) was one such site where ancient rationalism and the belief in the metamorphic possibilities of nature came into conflict. Storytellers recounted that these mountains were the location where two petrifications took place. Homer posited that Zeus had petrified the inhabitants of Sipylus, who could not bury Niobe's slain children.[360] According to Antoninus Liberalis, Mount Sipylus was where Pandareus fled after stealing Zeus's golden dog; there, Zeus caught Pandareus and turned his body into solid stone.[361] A much more popular myth was Niobe's petrification. From Homer to Ovid to modern travelers, viewers have imagined Niobe's body petrified amid a rocky mass on Sipylus' slopes.[362] However, two monuments on Mount Sipylus have been regarded as Niobe's petrified image. Some have imagined Niobe's petrified image in a Hittite relief that artists carved

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[360] *Iliad* 24.610-617: "οἱ μὲν ἄρ᾽ ἐννῆμαρ κέατ᾽ ἐν φόνῳ, οὐδέ τις ἦεν κατθάψαι, λαοὺς δὲ λίθους ποίησε Κρονίων· τοὺς δ᾽ ἄρα τῇ δεκάτῃ θάψαν θεοὶ Οὐρανίωνες. ἡ δ᾽ ἄρα σίτου μνήσατ᾽, ἐπεὶ κάμε δάκρυ χέουσα. νῦν δέ που ἐν πέτρῃσιν, ἐν οὔρεσιν οἰοπόλοισιν, ἐν Σιπύλῳ, ὅθι φασὶ θεάων ἔμμεναι εὐνὰς νυμφάων, αἵ τ᾽ ἀμφ᾽ Ἀχελώιον ἐρρώσαντο, ἔνθα λίθος περ ἐοῦσα θεῶν ἐκ κήδεα πέσσει" ("For nine days they lay in their blood, nor was there anyone to bury them, for the son of Cronos turned the people to stones; but on the tenth day the gods of heaven buried them; and Niobe took thought of food, for she was wearied with the shedding of tears. And now somewhere among the rocks, on the lonely mountains, on Sipylus, where, men say, are the couches of goddesses, of the nymphs that range swiftly in the dance about Achelous, there, though a stone, she broods over her woes sent by the gods.")

[361] Antoninus Liberalis, *The Metamorphoses of Antoninus Liberalis: A Translation with a Commentary*, trans. Francis Celoria (London: Routledge, 2018), no. 36. "Πανδάρεος ὁ Μέροπος κλέψας ᾤχετο φέρων εἰς Σίπυλον καὶ αὐτὸν παρεδέξατο φυλάττειν παρὰ τοῦ Πανδαρέου Τάνταλος ὁ Διὸς καὶ Πλουτοῦς. ἐπεὶ δὲ μετὰ χρόνον Πανδάρεος ἐλθὼν εἰς Σίπυλον ἀπῄτει τὸν κύνα, Τάνταλος ὤμοσε μὴ λαβεῖν. Ζεὺς δὲ Πανδάρεον μὲν ἀντὶ τῆς κλοπῆς ἐποίησεν ὅθιπερ εἱστήκει πέτρον· Τάνταλον δὲ, ἐπεὶ τὸν ὅρκον ἐψεύσατο, κατάβαλε καὶ περι<έθηκε περὶ> αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς τὸν Σίπυλον." ("Pandareus son of Merops stole the dog and carried it off to Mount Sipylus. He gave it to Tantalus, son of Zeus and Pluto, to guard. After a time Pandareus went to Mount Sipylus and asked for the dog. Tantalus swore he had never received it. To punish him for the theft Zeus turned Pandareus into a rock where he stood.").

[362] Modern travel: Henry J. van Lennep, *Travels in Little-Known Parts of Asia Minor: With Illustrations of Biblical Literature and Researches in Archaeology, in Two Volumes - Vol. 1* (London: John Murray, Abemarle Street, 1870), 305ff. For Homer, see the citation for Niobe's petrification just referenced in note 21. For Ovid, see the discussion on the subsequent page.

into a cliff-face likely during the thirteenth century BCE **[Figure 3.28]**.[363] Viewers imagine Niobe doomed to eternal mourning: she is seated, her head bows, and she "weeps" rivulets of tears, or rather, the illusion is summoned as waters trickle down the cliff-face from a nearby source. Others have seen Niobe's forms in a natural mass of rock that looks like a woman **[Figure 3.29]**. Niobe's face appears in profile; her long hair sweeps behind her back and cascades to the green grass, her shoulders and arms support her frame and stretch back behind her body, and (more vaguely) her legs seem crouched or bent at the knee. The total pareidolic vision is that of a woman who was petrified while falling to the earth. We cannot be exactly certain which of the monuments ancient travelers imagined to be the "true" Niobe in antiquity. In one scenario, viewers may have imagined the genderless Hittite relief as the petrified remains of Pandareus, while they identified the natural rock formation as Niobe. It is also possible that some viewers saw Niobe in the Hittite relief, while others traveled to witness the female-looking natural monument as a relic of the mythical past.

Regardless of which monument the ancients imagined to be the "true" Niobe, textual sources reveal radically different responses from viewers who visited Niobe's petrified remains. On the one hand, Ovid records that when the religiously minded ascended the mountain and saw "Niobe," they were awestruck with holy fear: "Then truly do all men and women fear the wrath of the goddess so openly displayed; and all more zealously than ever worship the dread divinity of the twin gods' mother [Leto]. And, as usual, stirred by the later, they tell over former tales." [364] Pareidolia thus served as a

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[363] Charles Burney, "Sipylus, Mount," in Historical Dictionary of the Hittites, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018), 261.
[364] *Metamorphoses* 6.313-316: "Tum vero cuncti manifestam numinis iram femina virque timent cultuque inpensius omnes magna gemelliparae venerantur numina divae; utque fit, a facto propiore priora renarrant."

physical relic of myth, the visible and tangible proof that divinities wielded terrible metamorphic powers. Across the generations, poets and pilgrims had reason to visit such sites as new iterations of myths came into being. While Ovid's claimed that the stone Niobe made "all men and women to fear the wrath of the goddess," there is evidence that some imagined this monument with a more critical eye that dispelled this sense of holy dread. Most generally, in the fourth century, Palaephatus dismissed the possibility of petrification simply as illogical. ("Anyone who believes that a human being turned into a stone or a stone into a human being is a fool."). [365] Later the words of the geographer Pausanias (c. 110 CE – 180 CE) and the poet Quintus Smyrnaeus (c. latter 4th century) would capture specific approaches to the Niobe monument based on optics and physical movement:

> This Niobe I myself saw when I had gone up to Mount Sipylus. When you are near it is a beetling crag, with not the slightest resemblance to a woman, mourning or otherwise; but if you go further away you will think you see a woman in tears, with head bowed down.[366]

Meanwhile, Quintus Smyrnaeus recounts:

> Dresaeus was slain by Ares' favorite Polypoetes, whom divine Neaera bore after sleeping with wise Theiodamas at the foot of snow-clad Sipylus. It was there that the gods turned Niobe into a rock, and her floods of tears still teem down from the hard crags as Hermus' streams reecho the groans in unison with the tall peaks of Sipylus, ever overspread with a mist that shepherds hate. Passing travelers wonder at how closely the rock resembles a grief-stricken woman, lamenting and miserable, in floods of tears. Seen from a distance, she is indeed lifelike; but from nearby she is seen to be a towering rock, a fragment of Sipylus. But there she is still among the crags in a lifelike pose of lamentation, ever bearing witness to the terrible wrath of the gods.[367]

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[365] Stern, *On Unbelievable Tales*, 40.

[366] *Description of Greece*, Attica 21.3: "ταύτην τὴν Νιόβην καὶ αὐτὸς εἶδον ἀνελθὼν ἐς τὸν Σίπυλον τὸ ὄρος· ἡ δὲ πλησίον μὲν πέτρα καὶ κρημνός ἐστιν οὐδὲν παρόντι σχῆμα παρεχόμενος γυναικὸς οὔτε ἄλλως οὔτε πενθούσης· εἰ δέ γε πορρωτέρω γένοιο, δεδακρυμένην δόξεις ὁρᾶν καὶ κατηφῆ γυναῖκα."

[367] *Posthomerica* 1.291-306: "Δρησαῖον δ' ἐδάμασσεν ἀρηίφιλος Πολυποίτης τὸν τέκε δῖα Νέαιρα περίφρονι Θειοδάμαντι μιχθεῖσ' ἐν λεχέεσσιν ὑπαὶ Σιπύλῳ νιφόεντι, ἧχι θεοὶ Νιόβην λᾶαν θέσαν, ἧς ἔτι δάκρυ πουλὺ μάλα στυφελῆς καταλείβεται ὑψόθε πέτρης, καί οἱ συστοναχοῦσι ῥοαὶ πολυηχέος Ἕρμου καὶ κορυφαὶ Σιπύλου περιμήκεες ὧν καθύπερθεν ἐχθρὴ μηλονόμοισιν ἀεὶ περιπέπτατ' ὀμίχλη· ἣ δὲ πέλει μέγα θαῦμα παρεσσυμένοισι βροτοῖσιν, οὕνεκ' ἔοικε γυναικὶ πολυστόνῳ ἥ τ' ἐπὶ λυγρῷ πένθεϊ μυρομένη μάλα

What is striking about both accounts is how a viewer's motions might enchant, disenchant, or reenchant an image of metamorphosis as Roman subjects adopted different physical vantage points. Pausanias' words are telling. From a distance, "you will *think* you see a woman in tears," while close scrutiny exposes merely a rocky surface, crawling with insects, without "the slightest resemblance to a woman." In Quintus Smyrnaeus' account, the distant view fills viewers with "wonder," whereas the close view reveals it as a fragment of the mountainside. Unlike Pausanias (and Ovid), Smyrnaeus also provides a naturalistic explanation for Niobe's weeping and groaning, which turn out to be the result of mists and echoey-streams. Yet the poet also allows for re-enchantment when his description shifts back to the realm of myth, where Niobe's petrification acts as a physical "witness to the terrible wrath of the gods." This approach to "seeing double" fits with other examples discussed in chapter two (e.g., Heraclitus' centaurs, Actaeon reliefs), in which distant viewing enchants the imagination. In contrast, close-looking focuses on details that dispel the magic of the fantastical world and qualify one's epistemic trust in sensory-derived insight. Even when zoomorphism can be discerned at close range, the distant view often distorts scale and enhances the fiction of pareidolia, as in the case of "La Roccia dell'Orso." At close proximity, one does indeed intuit a zoomorphic form, yet one that is without a doubt lithic, riddled with perforations and weathered to abstraction. Whereas the view across the sea blurs these details and thus seduces the mind with a more vivid fiction of an enormous bear hulking about the hillside **[Figures 3.25-26]**.

μυρία δάκρυα χεύει· καὶ τὸ μὲν ἀτρεκέως φῆς ἔμμεναι, ὁππότ’ ἄρ’ αὐτὴν τηλόθεν ἀθρήσειας· ἐπὴν δέ οἱ ἐγγὺς ἵκηαι, φαίνεται αἰπήεσσα πέτρη Σιπύλοιό τ’ ἀπορρώξ.ἀλλ’ ἣ μὲν μακάρων ὀλοὸν χόλον ἐκτελέουσα μύρεται ἐν πέτρῃσιν ἔτ’ ἀχνυμένῃ εἰκυῖα."

In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid captures such debates about the phenomenology of viewing metamorphic pareidolia through his fictional characters. In one instance, the hero Theseus and his companions find themselves invited to the cave of the water deity and shape-shifter Acheloos, who feeds them and regales them with tales of transformation. While in the cave the guests begin to look out over the sea.

> Then the noble hero [Theseus], looking forth upon the wide water spread before his eyes, pointed with his finger and said: "What place is that? Tell me the name which that island bears. And yet it seems not to be one island." The river-god replied: "No, what you see is not one island. There are five islands lying there together; but the distance hides their divisions. And, that you may wonder the less at what Diana did when she was slighted, those islands once were nymphs...[368]

In this passage, Ovid presents the reader with two distinct viewpoints: first, the traveler who sees islands from a distance for the first time and thus mistakes multiple islands for a single landmass (though not without some hesitancy); second, the expert who is not fooled by these optical illusions, because—we learn shortly afterward— Acheloos had seen the islands up-close, indeed, he was present when Diana formed them. Yet here, Ovid reverses the rationalistic expectations: experiencing the monuments—including how their appearance changes through optical distortions—does not result in disenchantment but cultivates a heightened sensitivity to pareidolic viewing instead, revealing the "truth" that Diana had once changed the bodies of nymphs into islands. One of the islands, however, pertains to another myth. Acheloos recounts that the most distant island was once his lover Perimele. When her father, Hippodamas, discovered the union, he was enraged and hurled his daughter from a cliff into the sea. Acheloos uttered a

[368] *Metamorphoses* 8.572-580: "tum maximus heros, aequora prospiciens oculis subiecta, "quis" inquit "ille locus?" (digitoque ostendit) "et insula nomen quod gerit illa, doce, quamquam non una videtur!" Amnis ad haec "non est" inquit "quod cernitis unum: quinque iacent terrae; spatium discrimina fallit. quoque minus spretae factum mirere Dianae, naides hae fuerant,..."

desperate prayer, and Neptune saved her by transforming her into an island, which sailors still recognized.

The idea that far-distant landmasses might actually be relics of metamorphosis, prompts stridently different responses from Acheloos' audience:

> With these words the river was silent. The story of the miracle had moved the hearts of all. But one mocked at their credulity, a scoffer at the gods, one reckless in spirit, Ixion's son, Pirithoüs. "These are but fairytales you tell, Acheloüs," he said, "and you concede too much power to the gods, if they give and take away the forms of things." All the rest were shocked and disapproved such words, and especially Lelex, ripe both in mind and years...[369]

On the one hand, the fictional character Pirithoüs voices the real concerns of many ancient rationalists ("scoffers"), who accepted the existence of the gods but thought that the metamorphosis exceeded the ambit of divine power by violating natural laws. On the other hand, there existed a popular mass that was still moved by the old tales. Ultimately, Ovid introduces the skeptic Pirithoüs, only to supply yet another tale that refutes his opinion. For Lelex stands up and claims to have witnessed with his own eyes a pair of intertwined trees in Phrygia that the local peasants championed as the once-human Baucis and Philemon, whose arboreal forms were now worshipped as gods.[370] In Ovid's fictional world this tale ultimately seems to have persuaded the rationalist. For this time, Ovid provides no qualifications to his hearer's response ("Lelex made an end: both the tale and the teller had moved them all; Theseus especially").[371]

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[369] *Metamorphoses* 8.611-6-17: "Amnis ab his tacuit. factum mirabile cunctos moverat: inridet credentes, utque deorum spretor erat mentisque ferox, Ixione natus "ficta refers nimiumque putas, Acheloe, potentes esse deos," dixit "si dant adimuntque figuras." obstipuere omnes nec talia dicta probarunt, ante omnesque Lelex animo maturus et aevo..."

[370] *Metamorphoses* 8. 715-724.

[371] *Metamorphoses* 8.725-726: "Desierat, cunctosque et res et moverat auctor, Thesea praecipue."

"Seeing" Faces in Trees

In Italy, between Ginosa and Apulia, there exists a monumental olive tree that locals call "The Thinking Tree" **[Figure 3.30]**. In true pareidolic fashion, it conjures in the mind's eye the imagery of a gnarled man trapped in the tree: his branches grow like hair, his face scowls with intellectual strain, his eyes squint and his brow furrows, his cheeks relax, his sharp nose angles to the earth, his beard twists with braids of roots, his skin has wizened with centuries of wear. In spirit, the whole effect is like a natural equivalent to Rodin's "The Thinker." No one knows the tree's exact age, and few know its precise location. Shortly after it was discovered (c. 2016), tourists began seeking out the site as news of its existence spread online. Yet efforts to protect the tree soon thwarted these attempts, as locals and select photographers agreed to keep its specific location secret (though, fortunately, video footage is available).[372]

As it so happens, the Thinking Tree is located in the general region where a metamorphosis into an olive tree is said to have occurred. Southeastern Italy has long been a region where olive trees have been domesticated, beginning in the Middle Bronze Age and continuing until Roman antiquity, after which olive cultivation fell into some disuse until it was revived during the twelve century.[373] Long ago, Ovid tells us, there

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[372] The photographer's description of the discovery is found in: Marzia Papagna, "Puglia, lo spettacolo social dell'ulivo pensieroso," March 9 2016, accessed December 15 2021, https://bari.repubblica.it/cronaca/2016/03/09/foto/puglia_lo_spettacolo_social_dell_ulivo_pensieroso-135137728/1/
See also, Marta Albe, "L'ulivo pensante di Ginosa: uno straordinario albero da proteggere," March 9 2016, accessed December 15 2021, https://www.greenme.it/informarsi/natura-a-biodiversita/ulivo-pensante-ginosa/
For video see: Anna Puricella, "Puglia, lo spettacolo dell'ulivo pensante: sembra ci sia un volto nell'albero 'nascosto' a Ginosa," la Repubblica, 23 May 2020, accessed December 15, 2021, https://video.repubblica.it/edizione/bari/puglia-lo-spettacolo-dell-ulivo-pensante-sembra-ci-sia-un-volto-nell-albero-nascosto-a-ginosa/360894/361449

was an Apulian shepherd, who began casting aspersions at a group of nymphs, and as a consequence, the nymphs punished him by turning him into an olive tree. "Nor did he [the shepherd] cease speaking until the rising wood covered his mouth. For now he is a tree. You could tell its kind from the savor of its fruit; for the wild olive bears the traces of his tongue in its bitter berries. The sharpness of his words has passed to them."[374] Although this myth is rather obscure myth for most moderns, in antiquity it afforded aetiological significance to Apulia, as the region where metamorphosis brought about the olive's characteristic bitter flavor. Through the tale of the Apulian shepherd, the mythically minded thus imagined that trace relics of a single individual's acrimony could somehow be present and discernible across generations of olive trees (a magical transfer in some ways akin to genetic inheritance).

Did the Thinking Tree exist in Roman antiquity? "The olive is a long-lived evergreen tree," writes a recent team of arboreal scientists, "capable of regenerating itself from any part of the plant (pollard tree). This characteristic has allowed the olive trees to survive across the centuries until they become real natural monuments."[375] In the case of the "Thinking Tree," it is hard to know the tree's exact chronology because it has yet to be studied by dendrochronologists. In internet lore, it is often claimed that Mediterranean olive trees span two millennia back to Roman times. As a counterreaction, one scientific

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[373] Valentina Caracuta, "Olive Growing in Puglia (Southeastern Italy): A Review of the Evidence from the Mesolithic to the Middle Ages," *Vegetation History and Archaeobotany* 29 (2020): 595-62.
[374] *Metamorphoses* 14.523-26: "nec prius os tacuit, quam guttura condidit arbor: arbor enim est, sucoque licet cognoscere mores. quippe notam linguae bacis oleaster Amaris exhibet: asperitas verborum cessit in illa."

[375] Raffaella Petruccelli et al., "Characterization and Conservation of 'Olivo della Strega': An Ancient Olive Tree, Precious Resource for Natural and Cultural Heritage," Rendiconti Lincei. Scienze Fisiche e Naturali volume 32 (2021): 311-24, esp. 311-13.

article has responded by "Demystifying the age of old olive trees." Per the article, most monumental olive trees often reach a maximum life span of between 300 and 500 years old.[376] However, other scientific studies have identified outliers. Well-known Olive trees — such as Gethsemane's oldest trees and Tuscany's so-called "Witch's Tree" ("Olivo della Strega")— date roughly between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries CE.[377] Olive trees, of course, are not the only aged trees. At the moment, European dendrochronologists are competing to find Europe's oldest tree. In 2017 "Adonis," a Bosnian pine from northern Greece, became Europe's oldest scientifically-dated tree, dating c. 942 CE. The next year (2018), the record was shattered, as "Italus" (a Heldreich's pine discovered in the Pollino wilds) was found to date c. 789 CE.[378] It remains to be seen how long this record will last. Still, we can say with some certainty that the age of the Thinking Tree does not date back to Roman antiquity. Its own family tree likely situates it between three and seven generations removed from Roman Antiquity, while the most aged European trees were likely the saplings of parents that lived during Ovid's era. Nonetheless, as a heuristic, the Thinking Tree helps us imagine ancient tree pareidolia, which no longer survive, unlike stone.

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[376] J. Julio Camarero et al., "Demystifying the Age of All Olive Trees," *Dendrochronologia* 65 (2021): 125802. For claims about 2000-year old olive trees, see: Anonymous, "The All This Olive Tree in the World: Elia Vouvon," Greek City Times, September 15, 2020, accessed December 1, 2021, https://greekcitytimes.com/2020/09/15/the-oldest-olive-tree-in-the-world-elia-vouvon/

[377] Petruccelli et al., "'Olivo della Strega,'"311-24, esp. 315. Gethsemane olives: Mauro Bernabei, "The Age of the Olive Trees in the Garden of Gethsemane," *Journal of Archaeological Science* 53 (2015): 43-48.

[378] For Adonis: Oliver Konter et al., "Meet Adonis, Europe's Oldest Dendrochronologically Dated Tree," *Dendrochronologia* 42 (2017): 12. For Italus: Gianluca Piovesan et al., "The Oldest Dated Tree of Europe Lives in the Wild Pollino Massif: Italus, a Strip-Bark Heldreich's Pine," *Ecology* 99 (2018): 1682-84.

Such monumental trees inhabit a liminal chronological space. Relative to the rocky faces of the pareidolia we have discussed thus far, arboreal pareidolia are chance ephemeral displays of Mother Nature's artistry. Relative to human life, their aged and charismatic forms stand as monuments for generations of people who gather at their roots to mythologize (and sometimes ritualize) their significance.[379]

From Daphne to Pitys to the nymph inside the sacred oak that Erysichthon felled, Mediterranean subjects imagined metamorphoses that implanted human souls within arboreal forms and ascribed them metamorphic aetiologies and pareidolic possibilities.[380] Antoninus Liberalis, for example, records the metamorphoses of some Messapian youth that are said to have occurred in southeast Italy (around modern Taranto). At a place called the "Sacred Rocks," the youth chanced upon a group of nymphs and challenged them to a dancing competition. The Messapians lost the event, and as punishment for seeking to out-dance divinities, the nymphs transformed their bodies into trees. Later Greco-Roman subjects memorialized the site and gave it a new name, calling it the place of the "Nymphs and the Youths." Ever after, people would venture into these groves at night, hear the quaking and murmuring of the woods, and imagine spirits still trapped within the old trees.[381] People did not always regard tree transformations as punishments but described them occasionally as a gift from heaven. As a reward for their singular

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[379] Petruccelli et al., "'Olivo della Strega,'"311; Ünal Asan, "Mystical and Holistic Aspect of the Monumental Trees, and their Importance for Ecotourism," *International Symposium on New Horizons in Forestry, 18–20 October, Isparta, Turkey*, 2017, 50-58.

[380] Buxton, *Forms of Astonishment*, 146, 163-165, 229. For plant transformations more generally, see: Irving, *Metamorphosis in Greek Myths*, 128-138.

[381] Celoria and Liberalis, *The Metamorphoses*, no. 31: "καὶ οἱ παῖδες, ἵναπερ ἑστήκεσαν παρὰ ἱερὸν τῶν νυμφῶν, ἐγένοντο δένδρη. καὶ ἔτι νῦν ἀκούεται φωνὴ νυκτὸς ἐκ τῆς ὕλης οἷα θρηνούντων..." ("The youths, as they stood by the sanctuary of the nymphs, were changed into trees. Even today one hears at night the sound of groans coming from the trunks.")

humility and devotion, Zeus thus granted Baucis and Philemon the opportunity to live a long life, pass on without needing to bury each other, and yet be divinized in arboreal form:

> Their request was granted. They had the care of the temple as long as they lived. And at last, when, spent with extreme old age, they chanced to stand before the sacred edifice talking of old times, Baucis saw Philemon putting forth leaves, Philemon saw Baucis; and as the tree-top formed over their two faces, while still they could they cried with the same words: 'Farewell, dear mate,' just as the bark closed over and hid their lips. Even to this day the Bithynian peasant in that region points out two trees standing close together, and growing from one double trunk. These things were told me by staid old men who could have had no reason to deceive. With my own eyes I saw votive wreaths hanging from the boughs, and placing fresh wreaths there myself, I said: 'Let those beloved of the gods be gods; let those who have worshipped be worshipped.'[382]

In this case, the pareidolic discernment of metamorphosis is both aural and visual, unlike the transformation of the Messapian youth. The storyteller, Lelex, emphasizes the visual evidence of tree-metamorphosis ("With my own eyes I saw votive wreaths hanging"). As in many other tree transformations (e.g., Daphne, the Heliades, the Apulian shepherd), human features are not entirely eradicated. Instead, the human body supplies the basic skeleton over which tree bark inexorably creeps and covers, turning limbs into branches (implying that viewers might discern anthropomorphic features beneath the rough surface of dendritic skin).[383] The notion that these strange forms reveal divine handiwork is

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[382] *Metamorphoses* 8.711-724: " vota fides sequitur: templi tutela fuere, donec vita data est; annis aevoque solute ante gradus sacros cum starent forte locique narrarent casus, frondere Philemona Baucis, Baucida conspexit senior frondere Philemon. iamque super geminos crescente cacumine vultus mutua, dum licuit, reddebant dicta 'vale' que'o coniunx' dixere simul, simul abdita texit ora frutex: ostendit adhuc Thyneius illic incola de gemino vicinos corpore truncos. haec mihi non vani (neque erat, cur fallere vellent) narravere senes; equidem pendentia vidi serta super ramos ponensque recentia dixi'cura deum di sint, et, qui coluere, colantur.'"

[383] Daphne: *Metamorphoses* 1.548-552: "vix prece finita torpor gravis occupat artus, mollia cinguntur tenui praecordia libro, in frondem crines, in ramos bracchia crescunt, pes modo tam velox pigris radicibus haeret, ora cacumen habet: remanet nitor unus in illa." ("Scarce had she thus prayed when a down-dragging numbness seized her limbs, and her soft sides were begirt with thin bark. Her hair was changed to leaves, her arms to branches. Her feet, but now so swift, grew fast in sluggish roots, and her head was now but a tree's top. Her gleaming beauty alone remained."). The Heliades are found in Metamorphoses 2.351-55: "haec stipite crura teneri, illa dolet fieri longos sua bracchia ramos, dumque ea mirantur, conplectitur

confirmed by oral tradition, especially the elderly (those "staid old men who could have had no reason to deceive"). The pareidolic mindset towards metamorphosis is thus ascribed to peasants, temple priests, and the aged whose own bodies were born in a time more proximate to the myth in question.

Hearing Voices and Haunting Echoes

Not all metamorphic pareidolia were made of stone or trees. The soundscape of the Mediterranean was haunted by noises that some thought betokened the presence of mythological figures. In seeking to articulate how echoes function, Lucretius (c. 99 – 55 BCE) recounts what he regards as a rural superstition. Amid shady mountains and rocky places, one notices how sounds betray the traces of fantasy in the natural world:

> Such places the neighbors imagine (*fingunt*) to be haunted by goatfoot satyrs and nymphs, and they say there are fauns, by whose night-wandering noise and jocund play they commonly declare the voiceless silence to be broken, with the sound of strings and sweet plaintive notes, which the pipe sends forth touched by the player's fingers; they tell how the farmers' men all over the countryside listen, while Pan, shaking the pine leaves that cover his half-human head, often runs over the open reeds with curved lips, that the panpipes may never slacken in their flood of woodland music. All other signs (*portenta*) and wonders (*monstra*) of this sort they relate, that they may not perhaps be thought to inhabit a wilderness which even the gods have left. This is why they bandy about these miraculous tales, or they are led by some other reason, since all mankind are too greedy for ears to tickle.[384]

Lucretius's critique reveals a cultural mentalité that imagined the forests and wilderness to be inhabited by such mythical beings. Satyrs or Pan might elude physical sight, but

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inguina cortex perque gradus uterum pectusque umerosque manusque ambit, et exstabant tantum ora vocantia matrem." ("One complained that her ankles were encased in wood, another that her arms were changing to long branches. And while they look on those things in amazement bark closes round their loins, and, by degrees, their waists, breasts, shoulders, hands; and all that was free were their lips calling upon their mother.")

[384] *De Rerum Natura* 4.580-594: "Haec loca capripedes satyros nymphasque tenere finitimi fingunt, et faunos esse loquuntur, quorum noctivago strepitu ludoque iocanti adfirmant volgo taciturna silentia rumpi, chordarumque sonos fieri dulcisque querellas, tibia quas fundit digitis pulsata canentum, et genus agricolum late sentiscere, quom Pan, pinea semiferi capitis velamina quassans, unco saepe labro calamos percurrit hiantis, fistula silvestrem ne cesset fundere musam. cetera de genere hoc monstra ac portenta loquuntur, ne loca deserta ab divis quoque forte putentur sola tenere. ideo iactant miracula dictis aut aliqua ratione alia ducuntur, ut omne humanum genus est avidum nimis auricularum."

their presence could be discerned through the soundscape: the sounds of the breeze moving across reeds, branches, and pines, revealed Pan's musical tunes and the rustle of his pine-needle wreath. When Lucretius mentions the presence of nymphs, he likely had in mind the mythology of Echo since his polemical detour is actually embedded in a broader discussion about the science of echoes.[385] Moreover, the passage as a whole evinces a belief, which Apuleius preserves more clearly, that Pan and Echo would meet together near mountains and streams, and Pan would teach Echo to sing his melodic strains.[386] Thus, when countryfolk called out and heard their echoes returned, they likely imagined the presence of the nymph Echo, whose flesh had dissolved until she became a wandering soul.

Lucretius' explication of echoes is replete with imagistic language. Echoes, he writes, "give back a sound and at times delude with the image of a word (*imagine verbi*)." When echoes bounce off the rocks, they give back the "shapes of words" (*formas verborum*). [387] A single echo, also multiplies into many voices, as its shape leaves a sonic imprint. ("Therefore one voice is dispersed suddenly into many voices, since it distributes itself amongst many separate ears, *stamping* on the words a *shape* and clear sound."). And when Lucretius describes how rural inhabitants "imagine" mythical beings amid the secret recesses of the landscape, he uses the verb "*fingo*," which can also mean "to form

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[385] For the philosophy of echoes, see: *De Rerum Natura* 4.563-614.

[386] For Pan teaching Echo see: *Metamorphoses* 5.25: "Tunc forte Pan deus rusticus iuxta supercilium amnis sedebat, complexus Echo montanam39 deam eamque voculas omnimodas edocens recinere." ("At that moment the rustic god Pan happened to be sitting beside the stream's brow, embracing the mountain goddess Echo and teaching her to sing back to him all kinds of tunes.")

[387] *De Rerum Natura* 4.570-71: "...reiecta sonorem reddit et interdum frustratur imagine verbi." For the "shapes of words" see 4.574.

or fashion by art (in wax, clay, stone, etc.)." [388] For Lucretius, the mind's mythical imagery is merely the twaddle of fairytales, an empty yearning against the reality of a disenchanted world (again, "that they may not perhaps be thought to inhabit a wilderness which even the gods have left.").

A second-century object, now called the Gosford Wellhead, discovered near sea-side Ostia, exemplifies two myths about water, reflections, and corporeal dissolution **[Figure 3.31**).[389] As others have noted, the rusted interior of this wellhead indicates that this well was in actual use during Roman antiquity.[390] In one scene, the sculptor has depicted the myth of Narcissus and Echo. One nymph pours from a vessel the river that captures Narcissus' reflection and runs around the base of the wellhead. Just opposite, the nymph Echo gazes at her lover from behind the cover of tree branches. Narcissus gazes into the water and appears spellbound by an image of himself that is both similar yet altered, as ripples distort hair and garments alike.[391] Indeed, when viewed anamorphically, the watery face dissolves entirely into the pattern of the waves;

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[388] For one voice into many: *De Rerum Natura* 4.565-67: "in multas igitur voces vox una repente diffugit, in privas quoniam se dividit auris, obsignans formam verbis clarumque sonorem." See note 43 for: "Such places the neighbors imagine (*fingunt*) to be haunted by goatfoot satyrs and nymphs."

[389] For an overview of the exhibition, including the most detailed and eloquent photographs of the Gosford Wellhead, see: Seán Hemingway, John A. and Carole O. Moran, "The Gosford Wellhead: An Ancient Roman Masterpiece," February 3, 2020, accessed June 3, 2021, https://www.metmuseum.org/press/exhibitions/2020/the-gosford-wellhead-an-ancient-roman-masterpiece# . For further descriptions of this wellhead, see: Paul Zanker, Christopher S. Lightfoot, and Joan R. Mertens, eds., Roman Art: A Guide through the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Collection (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2020), 6, 138-141, 201; Seán Hemingway, Joan R. Mertens, and Alexis M. Belis, "Recent Acquisitions: A Selection 2018–2020," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art* 78 (2021): 11-12.

[390] Seán Hemingway and Bruce Schwarz, "MetCollects, Episode 06: Puteal (wellhead) with Narcissus and Echo, and Hylas and the Nymphs," no. 25, 2019, accessed June 3, 2021, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/online-features/metcollects/puteal

[391] The relationship between mirroring and metamorphosis is widespread in Roman art. For numerous examples of the phenomenon, see "Metamorphosis and transformation" in the index of: Rabun M. Taylor, *The Moral Mirror of Roman Art* (New York, NY: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008).

meanwhile, just above the reflection, the viewer glimpses Narcissus's flowers growing on the bank, suggesting Narcissus' soon-to-be body **[Figures 3.32-33].**

In the second scene, the sculptor depicted the myth of Hylas and the Nymphs **[Figure 3.34]**. Ovid did not describe this myth in detail, but Nicander of Colophon (fl. second century BCE) did describe it in his "Changed Ones" (epitomized by Antoninus Liberalis 100-300 CE). During the quest for the Gold Fleece:

> The boy Hylas went carrying a pail to the River Ascanius to fetch water for the leaders. And when the nymphs, who were the daughters of this river, saw and fell in love with him, they pulled him in, dragging him down into the spring. After Hylas had disappeared, Heracles saw that he was not coming back to him and deserted the heroes, searching everywhere in the thickets, calling 'Hylas' again and again. The nymphs, fearing that Heracles might discover that they had hidden the lad among them, changed him into an echo which again and again echoed back the cries of Heracles.[392]

What the myths of Hylas as well as Narcissus and Echo have in common is that the bodies of both Echo and Hylas dissipate into echoes. Yet the sculptor did *not* use visual means to depict these resonant souls. Rather, I suggest, well-goers likely imagined the physical dematerialization of Echo and Hylas through the echoes that haunt wells. Just as watery reflections mimic yet alter imagery, so too would the wellhead altar human voices amid the sloshing of waters. Ancient subjects would likely call into the well, hear voices redound, proliferate, and change as they imagined the lost souls of Echo and Hylas trapped in the well.

The quest for resonant souls was not limited to a single wellhead and Lucretius's polemic against sensing the presence of Echo in the forest. Instead, one should situate

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[392] Celoria and Liberalis, *The Metamorphoses*, no. 26: "ὁ δὲ παῖς Ὕλας ἔχων κρωσσὸν ἦλθε πρὸς τὸν Ἀσκάνιον ποταμὸν ὕδωρ ἀποίσων τοῖς ἀριστεῦσι· καὶ αὐτὸν ἰδοῦσαι νύμφαι, <αἱ> τοῦ ποταμοῦ τούτου θυγατέρες, ἠράσθησαν, ἀρυόμενον δὲ καταβάλλουσιν εἰς τὴν κρήνην. καὶ ὁ μὲν Ὕλας ἀφανὴς ἐγένετο, Ἡρακλῆς δ', ἐπεὶ αὐτῷ οὐκ ἐνόστει καταλιπὼν τοὺς ἥρωας ἐξερευνᾷ πανταχοῖ τὸν δρυμὸν καὶ ἐβόησε πολλάκις τὸν Ὕλαν. νύμφαι δὲ δείσασαι τὸν Ἡρακλέα, μὴ αὐτὸν εὕροι κρυπτόμενον παρ' αὐταῖς, μετέβαλον τὸν Ὕλαν καὶ ἐποίησαν ἠχὼ καὶ πρὸς τὴν βοὴν πολλάκις ἀντεφώνησεν Ἡρακλεῖ."

such sources within a broader mythical worldview, which can be found in sources that span (at least) the Hellenistic era to the Second Sophistic.[393] Perhaps the most relevant source to the Gosford Wellhead mentions a practice preserved in Nicander's "Changed Ones" (again, via Antoninus Liberalis). Near the coast of the Black Sea, the priests would conjure Hylas' soul through ritual calls and responses ("To this day local people make sacrifices to Hylas by the spring. The priest calls him by his name three times and an echo replies three times.") [394] Likewise, the second-century geographer Pausanias documents architectural sites whose acoustics betokened the presence of souls from myth. At Corinth and Olympia, for example, one could visit what locals called "the Echo Portico," a site so named because it allowed visitors to shout and hear Echo's voice murmuring back in response.[395] Fictional accounts also envision the natural landscape or architectural sites as the locus where souls could be divined through echoing sounds. In the first century, Ovid also recounts the cultural tradition of venturing into the wilderness to find Echo's wandering soul. "She hides in woods and is seen no more upon the mountainsides, but *all may hear her*, for voice, and voice alone, still lives in her." Ovid's fictional universe also includes a mountain temple where "Rumor" dwells. "It is built all

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[393] That is, from Nicander to Antoninus Liberalis' collation of his sources.

[394] Celoria and Liberalis, *The Metamorphoses*, no. 26: "Ὕλᾳ δὲ θύουσιν ἄχρι νῦν παρὰ τὴν κρήνην οἱ ἐπιχώριοι καὶ αὐτὸν ἐξ ὀνόματος εἰς τρὶς ὁ ἱερεὺς φωνεῖ καὶ εἰς τρὶς ἀμείβεται πρὸς αὐτὸν ἠχώ."

[395] *Description of Greece*, *Corinth* 36.10: "τοῦ δὲ τῆς Χθονίας ἐστὶν ἱεροῦ στοὰ κατὰ τὴν δεξιάν, Ἠχοῦς ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπιχωρίων καλουμένη· φθεγξαμένῳ δὲ ἀνδρὶ τὰ ὀλίγιστα ἐς τρὶς ἀντιβοῆσαι πέφυκεν." (" while to the right of the sanctuary of Chthonia is a portico, called by the natives the Portico of Echo. It is such that if a man speaks it reverberates at least three times"). *Description of Greece*, *Elis* 22.17: "...τὸ δὲ τῆς Ἄλτεως πρὸ τῆς Ποικίλης στοᾶς καλουμένης, ὅτι ἦσαν ἐπὶ τῶν τοίχων γραφαὶ τὸ ἀρχαῖον. εἰσὶ δ᾽ οἳ τὴν στοὰν ταύτην καὶ Ἠχοῦς ὀνομάζουσι· βοήσαντι δὲ ἀνδρὶ ἑπτάκις ὑπὸ τῆς ἠχοῦς ἡ φωνή, τὰ δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ πλέον ἔτι ἀποδίδοται." ("...the other [image] is in the Altis in front of what is called the Painted Portico, because anciently there were pictures on the walls. Some call this Portico the Echo Portico, because when a man has shouted his voice is repeated by the echo seven or even more times.")

of echoing brass. The whole place resounds with confused noises, repeats all words and doubles what it hears." [396] In Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, Cupid's palace for Psyche envisions a rustic temple whose soundscape is spectral and whose architecture and materials are wondrous to behold. It was secreted in a grove and "constructed not with human hands but by divine skills." Its pictorially-patterned floor was paved with gems, its ceilings were coffered with ivory and citron wood, and every column and every wall were gilded with gold. All about her, Psyche heard the call of disembodied voices attending to her wants as servants. [397] In the end, the Gosford Wellhead should be situated amid a broader mythical worldview in which Roman subjects expected to encounter soulful voices either in remote regions or through religious objects (or architecture) that summoned such presences. In the imagination, sounds often represented the traces of metamorphic change, the effect of corporality that had been sublimated into soulful mummers and echoes.

Conclusion

This chapter began by prompting the following questions: what was the historical relationship between pareidolia and metamorphosis, ancient rationalism and enchantment? How did the ancient science of optics and acoustics relate to pareidolic imagery? And how might images of Bacchic madness have enticed viewers into these hallucinatory worlds of insanity and transformation?

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[396] For Echo, see: *Metamorphoses* 3.400-401: "inde latet silvis nulloque in monte videtur, omnibus auditur: sonus est, qui vivit in illa."; For Rumor, see: *Metamorphoses* 12.46-47: "nocte dieque patet; tota est ex aere sonanti, tota fremit vocesque refert iteratque quod audit."

[397] *Metamorphoses* 5.1 "aedificata non humanis manibus, sed divinis artibus"; For the broader description of the royal palace see: *Metamorphoses* 5.2-4.

From Homer (c. 8th cent. BCE) to Ovid (43 BCE-18 CE), to Antoninus Liberalis (100-300 CE), and Quintus Smyrnaeus (c. latter 4th century) — we have seen how a chorus of poets often endowed natural pareidolia with metamorphic significance. Some imagined rocky outcrops to be mythical petrifications (Niobe, Rhodope, Lichas, etc.). Others perceived anthropomorphic features in a tree's gnarled bark and branches — or tasted an olive tree's bitter fruit – and determined that such subtleties revealed traces of a prior human existence (the Apulian shepherd, Baucis and Philemon, etc.). Yet others imagined wilderness sounds or the echoes produced by reverberant architecture as evidence of souls that had undergone a metamorphic change (Echo, Hylas). According to Ovid, the types of people who were enchanted by pareidolia were travelers, sailors, peasants, priests, and storytellers who passed down "old tradition." Sometimes the boundary between pareidolic imagery and intentional works of art was blurred. For Greco-Roman spectators—the colossal reliefs of forgotten civilizations, carved from mountainsides, now weathered and dilapidated—seemed like the freakish remnants of petrifications and the wrath of the gods (e.g., Rhodope and potentially the Hittite relief at mount Sipylus). In the case of the Barber cup's Silenus relief, the artist carved the face in a location where the marble veining seems to trace out the shoulders and bust of this mythical figure (echoing Pliny's account that stone-workers discovered by chance an image of Silenus in the patterns of marble after cracking open the stone). The Gosford Wellhead provides yet another example. Yet, in this case, the pareidolic "imagery" was acoustic, as Roman subjects imagined the souls of Echo and Hylas in the haunting echoes of the well. On the other hand, rationalists—from philosophers to travelers or even poets—disenchanted pareidolic phenomena of their mythical possibilities. The

rationalistic approach often ascribed mythical change to sensory misperceptions. For Lucretius, echoing wilderness sounds were merely the wild fantasies of rural folk, who could not bear to imagine that the divine presence had deserted the natural world. Others disenchanted the landscape's pareidolia. Even if Ovid located Niobe's petrification on mount Sipylus, Pausanias and Quintus Smyrnaeus explicitly stated that the mythical interpretation of this monument was an optical trick. From a distance, one could indeed discern the forms of a woman, but as one moved closer, the rocky crag bore no human resemblance. As we have seen in chapter two, it was a common technique to disenchant mythical creatures by ascribing them to the optical distortions that come from viewing bodies or objects at a distance. All taken together, our sources reveal some broad historical patterns. Although evidence of metamorphic pareidolia exists from ancient Greece, the bulk of the sources that debate this topic survive from Roman antiquity during the first through fourth centuries CE. It seems that Roman attitudes to the mythical possibilities of pareidolia were divided, a trend similar to the polarization towards metamorphic imagery during the Second Sophistic that was discussed in chapters one and two.

We have seen various ways that images of Pentheus and Lycurgus prompted spectators to imagine themselves as participants in the insanities of Bacchic myth. From a Greek red-figure cup to the Pentheus fresco at the House of the Vettii, to the Lycurgus cup, spectators were prompted by well-known visual prototypes (or nearby comparisons) to "see double:" seeing, for example, Lycurgus's body, yet imagining serpentine hallucinations crawling upon his skin, due to the image's resemblance to Laocoön (and one's memory of the manias described in texts). Representations of zoomorphic delusions

thus transferred the process of representation to the medium of imagination and memory, causing spectators to "see" like those whose minds Bacchus has bewitched. Ritual was also critical to the magic of these myths. It is only when the red-figure cup was worn as a mask that intoxicated symposiasts discerned a strange beast with vertical slit pupils. Moreover, when the Lycurgus cup was exposed to candlelight, its material fluctuations enchanted spectators; and it was when this cup was guzzled to the dregs that viewers glimpsed Lycurgus's phantom on the inside of the vessel. Both the Lycurgus cup and the Pentheus cup represented myth most fully when viewers engaged with imagery inside and outside these vessels. Many images also have enchanted material qualities. From the Ptolemaic era to the Roman Empire, artists placed increased emphasis on the evocative material qualities of wondrous cups. Long before the Lycurgus cup ever worked its magic, the Barber cup's dichroic materiality simulated the color changes of ripening grapes. The Farnese cup also envisioned its own bloodthirsty vision of the Gorgon's severed head. Lastly, the images we discussed fit within the context of the symposium, where intoxication only added to these spells of enchantment and irrationality.

The objects in this chapter also indicate some broader historical conclusions. Although many educated Greeks and Romans did not accept myth's strange and miraculous features, it would likely be a mistake to conclude that enchantment was only the domain of the lower classes. The images and objects we have explored indicate patrons of some economic means and sophistication. Indeed, the Lycurgus cup could only have been commissioned by Roman society's highest level of patronage. Ultimately, I have argued that the metamorphic image is just as much about the spectator's mental representations as it is the physical work of art. We can thus expand our horizon of what

counts as a metamorphic image: the landscape with its windswept anthropomorphic freaks, the echoes that haunt the bottom of a well, or mental representations that an image entices during a state of drunken clamor.

CHAPTER 4

THE MASK OF METAMORPHOSIS: TRANSFORMATION AS MASQUERADE IN EGYPTIAN NORTH AFRICA

Chapter four shifts from the art of metamorphosis in Greco-Roman culture to Egyptian (and Egyptianizing) culture under Greco-Roman rule. Although the vocabulary of disguise and dress is common in tales of transformation (e.g., *induo*), rationalist iconographic studies predominate, and visual studies of metamorphosis have yet to fully explore the relationship between fashion and transformation (much less the sense of enchantment these disguises produced in viewers and wearers).[398] Moreover, Western assumptions about masks and ritualized dress have sometimes created an inaccurate understanding of key objects and in some cases, excluded Egyptian objects from the corpus of study, especially when they pertain to the Greco-Roman period (see the discussion of the ceramic Anubis mask and crocodile skins below).[399] In this chapter, I argue for a more expansive definition of the metamorphic image that includes disguised human beings as embodied icons of metamorphosis. Such bemasked icons are about interrelationships between the mask and the interior, artifice and truth, body and soul. Yet the art of masquerade was not just about drama and performance but a means of creating sacred and mysterious changes: turning ordinary materials and experiences into a darkened, flickering, and spellbinding perception of the gods. Such experiences were framed by the broader historical zeitgeist, which has been laid out previously (chapters 1-3). As Greco-Roman rationalists increasingly railed miraculous transformations as

[398] For the general state of the field see the Introduction as well as the scholarship mentioned in chapters 1-3.

[399] See discussion and sources discussed especially in the sections titled: "Phenomenological Implications of an Anubis Mask" and "Within Crocodile Skin" Parts 1-2.

absurd, others were enticed by the sense of mystery and enchantment envisioned by Egyptian metamorphic imagery.

My argument precedes in the following manner. First, for readers who may be unfamiliar with Egyptian mythology, I provide a brief introduction to metamorphic change in the Egyptian imagination. Second, my argument examines case studies that explore the relationship between costumes and transformation through Apuleius's textual representations, painted frescoes at the Tigran Tomb in Alexandria, a Greco-Roman Anubis mask, and a crocodile-skin vestment.

Here it is essential to discuss some relevant terminology. So far, the etymology of the words "costume" and "mask" has not yet been traced back to antiquity (French *costume* 1777, and medieval Latin *masca*), though ceremonial, ritual and theatrical clothing did exist in the ancient world.[400] Ancient Greek writers used terms like the noun προσωπεῖον ("mask") or the verb μετασκευάζω ("put into another dress" "change the fashion of" or "transform"), showing the interrelationship between refashioning appearance and transformation. Meanwhile, Latin writers used terms like the noun "*persona*" to describe "a mask" or "a masked person." Then there was the capacious noun "*imago*," whose meanings ranged from an "image" or "likeness" to a "mask," or even a "ghost" or "phantom."[401] The ancient Egyptians lacked a specific term for mask or costume, but the verb *ḥbs* meant to "clothe, hide," or "cover-up." Interestingly, although linguists have yet to trace the etymology of the term "mask" more anciently than medieval Latin, there just so happens to be some haunting ancient Egyptian cognates:

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[400] *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "mask," "costume."

[401] *A Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "προσωπεῖον," "μετασκευάζω"; *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "*imago.*"

msḳ ("leather") and *msk*ꜣ ("skin," "leather").[402] In the case of the crocodile skins from the British Museum, we will see an example of a *msk*ꜣ that was a body-length leather mask. However, I suggest that the Egyptian understanding of this object also held valences in common with Classical vocabulary such as μετασκευάζω and *imago*, relating transformation and iconic embodiment.

Introduction to Metamorphic Change in the Egyptian Imagination

From the Egyptian old Kingdom until the centuries that Egypt became a Roman province, native Egyptian religion imagined gods with metamorphic powers. In Middle Egyptian, the term *ḫprw* ("transform one's self into," "modes of being") referred to the manifold transformations of gods and deified mortals and were imagined through the hieroglyphic phonogram of the scarab beetle (a metamorphic creature *par excellence*).[403] In Egyptian religion, divine flesh was infinitely malleable, divisible, and reproducible. Gods could take bestial forms or transmute their flesh into precious substances, and they possessed the powers of multilocation, appearing in various areas simultaneously. This latter ability aided the gods as they inhabited statues and images in multiple locations across the land of Egypt and abroad. The gods also found ways to exceed the remit of their supernatural talents by merging with other deities in the Egyptian pantheon or

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[402] *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, s.v. "*msḳ*," "*msk*ꜣ."
[403] Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Unstitute, 2002), 233; Françoise Dunand and Christiane Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in Egypt: 3000 BCE to 395 CE* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004), 15. The most detailed treatment is: Anne Maria Landborg, "Manifestations of the Dead in Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts" (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 2014), ix, 57-64.

sometimes with foreign deities. In funerary spells, the deceased person's *ba* (an aspect of the soul) would undergo transformations (*ḫprw*).[404]

Although the focus of this dissertation is not primarily iconographic in method, it is worth briefly describing some fundamental aspects of metamorphic representation, as it lays a foundation for understanding additional methods in this chapter. In Egyptian iconography, the gods are rarely limited to a single pictorial form. From the second dynasty onwards, most deities could take anthropomorphic, zoomorphic, or "mixed bodies." Such mixed representation can include a creaturely face placed on top of an anthropomorphic body, or a human countenance can be joined to a zoomorphic body, or else an anthropomorphic frame and face have zoomorphic appendages such as avian wings that grow from the arms or the "crown" of the head as in some representations of Isis. As Eric Hornung and others have shown, the mixed corporality of the gods does not attempt to capture the 'one true image' of the god, for instance, Anubis as a man with a "jackal head." Rather, divine hybridity imagines the metamorphic possibilities that populate textual descriptions of divine beings (calling them "rich in manifestations," "Lord of manifestations," "Lord of faces," "many-face," etc.).[405] Such images both reveal and conceal the divine. Each image is artificial in that it does not fully envision divinity

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[404] Landborg, "Manifestations of the Dead," 60; Christina Riggs, "Body," in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Willeke Wendrich, et al. (Los Angeles: California Digital Library, 2010), 3-4; Garry J. Shaw, The Egyptian Myths: A Guide to the Ancient Gods and Legends (London: Thames & Hudson, 2014), 13.

[405] Erik Hornung*, Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many, trans. John Baines* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 125-126. Metamorphic power is often described as having "many visages": Françoise Dunand and Zivie-Coche, *Gods and Men in* Egypt, 15-17, 19; Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 71.

in an entirely mimetic way, yet truthful since the image was understood to be the "body" of the gods. Yet it is in the treasury of human memory that the vision of the gods is most untrammeled: over time, the mind's eye sees the untamed multitude of possibilities of divine corporeality, recalling the belief that the gods may take whatever forms the heart desires. In so doing, the gods are revealed to humanity, embodied through visual art, and yet beyond complete mortal comprehension.

Such ideas open up additional insights into ancient Mediterranean art and religion from a cross-cultural perspective. As we have seen in chapter two, it was largely taboo for Greco-Roman artists to depict the transformations of Olympian deities by envisioning them with mixed corporeal forms for fear of equating divine bodies with the grotesque (even if depicting transformations through hybrid bodies was permitted of lesser beings like Daphne, Actaeon, etc.). Indeed, the ridicule of Egyptian theriomorphic gods was a favorite trope of Greco-Roman authors who were unsettled by the foreignness of Egyptian religion. The Roman attitude towards Egyptian religion largely mirrored the societal divisions (rationalism versus enchantment) towards Greco-Roman myth, not only because Egyptian religion was foreign but due to broader rationalist skepticism toward divine animality. As Steven D. Smith has observed, it seems that by the second and third centuries CE, societal attitudes had become the most polarized: on the one hand, rationalists derided the animal gods of Egypt, while commoners and emperors alike (e.g., Domitian, Hadrian, Commodus) were seduced by the exoticism and mystery of Egyptian religious imagery.[406]

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[406] Steven D. Smith, *Man and Animal in Severan Rome: The Literary Imagination of Claudius Aelianus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 155-157; Fritze, *Egyptomania*, 104-107.

The Mask of Metamorphosis: Apuleius, Africa, and the Cult of Isis

By the first century CE, the Roman Empire had annexed the entire North African littoral, and Egyptian religion and all manner of African exotica began increasingly infiltrating Roman culture. During this time, Egypt and Rome exchanged cultures, goods, and religious ideas, and Romans were polarized in their attitudes toward Egyptian civilization. Some writers like Juvenal satirized Egyptian religion for its bizarre devotion to animals and animal-headed deities. Others developed an obsession with Egyptian culture and religion that scholars often term "Egyptomania." Attracted to ideas about personal salvation and transformation, fertility and resurrection, many Romans became entranced with a mystery religion called the cult of Isis. The religion mixed ideas from native Egyptians with Greco-Roman beliefs, for instance, often conflating the Roman goddess Diana with the Egyptian mother goddess Isis.[407] Given that the secrets of the cult of Isis were known only to initiates, it is difficult to reconstruct precisely what it entailed. However, Apuleius's (c. 124-170) *Metamorphoses* (otherwise titled the *Golden Ass*) provides tantalizing glimpses. In the novel, the hero is transformed into an ass, travels the Mediterranean, and is turned back into human form by the goddess Isis. The story also describes a ritual setting where metamorphic change could occur amid rituals and masquerades.

Traditionally scholars have tended to characterize Apuleius as an author whose identity and self-fashioning were predominantly Roman. In recent years, however, scholars have increasingly drawn attention to African influences in *The Metamorphoses*.

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[407] Ronald H. Fritze, *Egyptomania: A History of Fascination, Obsession and Fantasy* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2017), 104-105.

Indeed, Apuleius partially conflates his own identity and story with his protagonist, Lucius: both claim to be Greeks with Roman names but were born in North Africa in a city called Madauros (roughly at the Crossroads of modern Tunisia, Libya, and Algeria). As specialists have shown, Apuleius's writing betrays peculiar linguistic, poetic, and cultural interests that reflect his North African Latin-speaking heritage.[408] In addition, in the novel's culminating chapter (Book 11), the book takes an Egyptianizing turn as Lucius is transformed back into a man after joining an Isis procession at Kenchreai and eating roses offered to him by a priest.

In the transformation scene, metamorphosis and masquerade are treated as synonymous principles. After the goddess Isis appears to Lucius in a dream, she commands him to be healed by entering her celebrations, meeting her priest, and eating a crown of roses. Apuleius wakes up covered in perspiration and feeling sentiments of both joy and fear. Meanwhile, his perception of the natural world has been altered, and it seems to him as if all the natural world (animals, plants, sea, and sky) is strangely rejoicing.[409] Amid Nature's festive attitude, the "ass" beholds the prelude of the Isis parade:

> And now the prelude to the great procession gradually began to march by, everyone beautifully attired in fancy dress according to his own choice and desire. One had strapped on a sword-belt and was *playing* the soldier; another, wearing a tucked-up cloak, was marked by his boots and spears as a huntsman; another, dressed in gilt slippers, a silk dress, and precious ornaments, had fastened a wig of curls to his head, and with a swirling gait was *pretending* to be a woman. Still another was distinguished by greaves, shield, helmet, and sword: *you would think* he had come from a school of gladiators. There was someone *playing at* being a magistrate, with rods and a purple toga; and someone with a long cloak, a staff, wicker sandals, and a goatee beard, *pretending* to be a

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[408] See the various entries from a recent volume on the subject, especially by Silvia Mattiacci, Daniel L. Selden, and the introduction: Benjamin Todd Lee, Ellen Finkelpearl, and Luca Graverini, eds., *Apuleius and Africa* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor et Francis Group, 2014), 1-22, esp. 1-6, 13-14, 87-111, 205-270.

[409] The passage that describes the masquerade as a whole is found: Apuleius, the *Metamorphoses* 11. 8-16.

> philosopher; and a pair carrying two different kinds of rods, the one with bird-lime representing a fowler, the other with hooks a fisherman. *I also saw* a tame bear who was dressed like a Roman matron and carried in a sedan chair, and a monkey with a Phrygian woven cap and saffron dress, *looking like* the shepherd-boy Ganymede, carrying a golden cup; and an ass with wings glued on his back, walking beside a decrepit old man, so that *you would call* the one Bellerophon and the other Pegasus, but laugh at both.[410]

In the mix of the parade, Lucius sees a hunter, a fisherman, and a fowler — all professions that hunt animals — likely literary allusions that the goddess Isis has caught a new animal for her cult. Elsewhere, disguises often transgress the boundaries of the natural world, society, myth, and reality. Apuleius sees a man pretending to be a woman, a commoner dressed as a magistrate, a monkey becomes a boy, a mere ass becomes Pegasus, and of all things, there was "a tame bear who was dressed like a Roman matron and carried in a sedan chair." The humorous aspects of such disguises only add to Lucius's perception that feelings of joy now pervade the world, while they act as a prelude to the ass-metamorphosis that will soon take place. In this passage, it has been observed that Apuleius uses language that repeatedly draws attention to artificiality of these disguises, unlike the man whose soul is clothed with an ass's body.[411] We can also add that the descriptions of the parade-attire place emphasis on the perceptions of actors and viewers, as both allow their senses and imagination to accept (but not entirely) the

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[410] *Metamorphoses* 11.8: "Ecce pompae magnae paulatim praecedunt anteludia votivis13 cuiusque studiis exornata pulcherrime. Hic incinctus balteo militem gerebat, illum succinctum chlamyde crepides et venabula venatorem fecerant, alius soccis obauratis inductus serica veste mundoque pretioso et attextis capite crinibus incessu perfluo feminam mentiebatur. Porro alium ocreis scuto galea ferroque insignem e ludo putares gladiatorio procedere. Nec ille deerat qui magistratum fascibus14 purpuraque luderet, nec qui pallio baculoque et baxeis et hircino barbitio philosophum fingeret, nec qui diversis harundinibus alter aucupem cum visco, alter piscatorem cum hamis induceret. Vidi et ursam mansuem, quae15 cultu matronali sella vehebatur, et simiam pilleo textili crocotisque Phrygiis Catamiti pastoris specie aureum gestantem poculum, et asinum pinnis agglutinatis adambulantem cuidam seni debili, ut illum quidem Bellerophontem, hunc autem diceres Pegasum, tamen rideres utrumque."

[411] Ashli J. E Baker, "Appearances Can Be Deceiving: Costume and Identity in Apuleius's Metamorphoses, Florida, and Apology," *Arethusa* 50 (2017): 335-367, esp. 347-348.

fiction of the actor's "transformations." ("playing," "pretending," "you would think," "looking like," "I also saw" "you would call").

In the moments preceding Lucius's transformation, he sees initiates and priests march forward wearing linen and shining lamps:

> Immediately thereafter came the gods, deigning to walk with human feet. First that awesome messenger between the gods above and those below the earth, with a face now black and now gold, tall, raising high his dog's neck: Anubis, carrying a caduceus in his left hand and brandishing a green palm-branch in his right. Immediately in his footsteps followed a cow reared to an upright posture, a cow, the fertile symbol of the divine mother of all, which, supported on his shoulders, one of the priesthood carried with proud and rhythmic steps.[412]

At this point, the procession has thus become a divine masquerade, as the crowd contemplates priests wearing disguises that expose their human feat as they walk. Yet unlike the prelude to the procession, these disguises are described as if they were the actual Egyptian divinities (termed matter-of-factly as "the gods," "Anubis," "a cow," etc.). This literary portrayal of deities that walk among mortals also fits Egyptian iconography, which often depicted deities with zoomorphic faces and anthropomorphic bodies and legs. In the passage, the "cow" likely refers to the goddess Isis, as it envisioned the fertility of "the divine mother of all" and acted as a seat for a priest. (According to one myth, Isis is the symbolic throne of Horus, who decapitates Isis, whose head is magically replaced with that of a cow.)[413]Amid the crowd, Apuleius also sees an

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[412] *Metamorphoses* 11.11:"Nec mora cum dei dignati pedibus humanis incedere prodeunt, hic horrendus ille superum commeator et inferum, nunc atra, nunc aurea facie sublimis, attollens canis cervices arduas, Anubis, laeva caduceum gerens, dextera palmam virentem quatiens. Huius vestigium continuum sequebatur bos in erectum levata statum, bos, omniparentis deae fecundum simulacrum, quod residens umeris suis proferebat unus e ministerio beato gressu gestuosus."
[413] Geraldine Pinch, *A Guide to the Gods, Goddesses and Traditions of Ancient Egypt* (Santa Barbara, CA: Oxford University Press, 2002), 151.

embodied icon of Anubis, whose mask seems to extend his neck and head so that he towers above the crowds with divinely magnified scale. Apuleius also portrays the mask as partially gilded since it undergoes colorful dichroic changes, as if from night to dawn (or "a face now black now gold").

At this point, the most persuasive disguise enters the procession: the soul of a man secreted within the skin of an ass, as Lucius joins the parade and eats a crown of roses held out by one of the priests. Then his body gradually transforms part-by-part from ass to man, and he finds himself nude amid the astonished onlookers. And just in case the reader has missed that Lucius's zoomorphic form was a disguise (thematically parallel to those in the masquerade), the now-human-hero can finally exclaim that "the ass had stripped me of his abominable coat." Without his zoomorphic "coat," Lucius finds himself nude amidst a crowd of astonished onlookers. So, the priest orders that a small linen cloth cover Lucius's nakedness, but someone from the crowd actually gives him the outer part of a tunic. ("For as soon as the ass had stripped me of his abominable coat, I pressed my thighs tightly together and placed my hands carefully in front of me so as to protect myself properly with natural covering, as much as a naked man could.") [414] In some ways, Apuleius describes metamorphosis as distinct from masquerading since those in the parade wear their costumes more briefly, while Lucius' coat of skin is inextricable

[414] *Metamorphoses* 11. 14: "Nam me cum primum nefasto tegmine despoliaverat asinus, compressis in artum feminibus et superstrictis accurate manibus, quantum nudo licebat velamento me naturali probe muniveram. Tunc e cohorte religionis unus impigre superiorem exutus tunicam supertexit me celerrime." ("For as soon as the ass had stripped me of his abominable coat, I pressed my thighs tightly together and placed my hands carefully in front of me so as to protect myself properly with natural covering, as much as a naked man could. Then one of the faithful quickly took off his outer tunic and hastily covered me.")

without magical aid. Nonetheless, Apuleius has portrayed metamorphosis as conceptually similar to the masquerade as both involve changing appearances and hidden identities.

Within the narrative, there is also an element of sympathetic magic, as fashionably transformed appearances prepare the way for fleshy transformations. Not only is the magic sympathetic, but it is also gradually contagious: from the prelude's obvious fiction to the "real" gods who walk with human feet, to the actual ass-metamorphosis, the theme of transformation is itself changed, as playful and fictive fashions give way to the wonder of witnessing the unlikely and inexplicable—an actual body magically clothed in the new skins. Yet, unlike the prior disguises, Apuleius' transformation is a moment of revelation rather than concealment, an epiphany that strips away the exterior disguise in favor Lucius' natural anthropomorphic body.

The Tigrane Tomb: Flickering Visions of Masked Deities

Likely just a few decades before Apuleius published his *Metamorphoses*, artists working in Alexandria painted representations of the Isis mysteries in a space that scholars now call "The Tigrane Tomb."[415] **[Figures 4.1-2]**. The tomb's visual program is largely unique, although Marjorie Susan Venit has persuasively shown that many individual images parallel visual and textual sources related to the cult of Isis. She argues that the tomb was the final resting place of members of the cult of Isis and that guild members may have visited the site, perhaps banqueting in honor of the deceased, as images also served as a reminder of the cult's rituals.[416] My analysis builds upon, and at

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[415] Marjorie Susan Venit, "The Tomb from Tigrane Pasha Street and the Iconography of Death in Roman Alexandria," *American Journal of Archaeology* 101 (1997): 726.

[416] Venit, "The Tomb from Tigrane," 701-729, esp. 722-729.

times debates, her iconographic observations while also considering the phenomenology of viewing these images.

As second-century viewers entered the triclinium, they would have likely observed the three central scenes from left to right, witnessing the symbolic journey of an initiate. In the left niche, one sees the initiate **[Figure 4.3]**. His head is garlanded, his waist is wrapped in a small fabric, and a breast-covering hangs from the shoulders to the waist. The latter, it seems, is not likely a representation of the initiate's musculature as has been suggested by Venit but likely envisions snake-skin scales (as are depicted in the representations of serpents throughout the chamber). The initiate's body also crouches, and his hands clasp together near the loins, alluding to the initiate's once-nude body. Here Venit misses the close parallel with the moment just after Lucius's ass-metamorphosis (Again, "...I pressed my thighs tightly together and placed my hands carefully in front of me so as to protect myself.").[417] In the central niche, one sees the initiate now wrapped in mummified bandages, as if dead **[Figure 4.4]**. Lastly, in the right niche, the initiate appears "resurrected," and the viewer sees an egg (on a column) wrapped in the Isis knot, alluding to the regenerative powers of the goddess and her cult **[Figure 4.5]**. The initiate, newly transformed, now dons three articles of clothing. The viewer glimpses mummy bandages in rhomboid patterns that adhere tightly to the trunk and legs. The headdress portrays the pattern of a serpent's underbelly, and the apron girds the waist, likely envisioning serpent scales. Moreover, the initiate holds forth a feather as an offering to the "goddess" before him in each hand. Throughout the visual program, this scale-like

[417] Venit, "The Tomb from Tigrane," 713.

pattern is depicted in brown or greenish-brown hues, perhaps indicating that actual disguises may have imitated a snake-skin aesthetic by using leather or curated crocodile skin. There is, in fact, a crocodile-skin vestment, which survived from antiquity, as we shall discuss shortly **[Figures 4.11-13].** All taken together, viewers would have seen the initiate reborn in the image of a feathered serpent, similar to the Ur-Uatchti that hovers overhead (it is a winged sun disc with two serpents or uraei).[418]

Depicted about the initiate, viewers would have also contemplated images of priests and priestesses whose disguises had transformed them into divinities. In the left niche, viewers saw two men that appear as feathered serpents, wearing a scaly robe and holding forth arms with feathery prosthetic wings **[Figure 4.3]**. With their outstretched feathers, these men adopt the appearance of Isis and Nephthys—female deities. In the central niche, by contrast, viewers would have seen a woman, who had taken on the appearance of a feathered serpent but also sported a faux beard on her chin as if she were a man **[Figure 4.4]**. The viewer thus contemplates sacerdotal costumes that traverse species and genders and even make mortals into gods. Though overlooked, it is clear that sacerdotal dress was implicated in metamorphic change just as much as ceremonial outfits of the initiate.

Another detail is also worth noting. As viewers approached the imagery in the central niche, they would have also been flanked by paintings of Anubis upon the niche's lateral pilasters **[Figure 4.6]**. According to Venit, such imagery should likely be interpreted as a priest donning an Anubis mask since the artist has painted the "head" so

[418] Anthony S. Mercatante, *Who's Who in Egyptian Mythology* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter Inc., 1978), 206.

that its red ochre skin contrasts radically with the exposed skin elsewhere on the body, which is the same yellow ocher and beige colors that envision human skin throughout the visual program. This "Anubis," moreover, wears snake scales of green and brown upon his chest, similar to the other actors that masquerade throughout this iconic program as walking, talking feathered serpents.[419] But perhaps the ambiguity between mask and skin was precisely the point, obscuring the distinction between priests and gods.

During the second century, those who visited the Tigrane Tomb would have encountered a dark, gloomy windowless space **[Figures 4.1-2]**.[420] Viewers would have seen the images under the mysterious glow and shape-shifting shadows cast by lamps or torches rather than the crisply contoured photographs which reproduce their imagery in modern times. As if entering a subterranean cavern or the underworld itself, viewers would have passed through a narrow corridor before glimpsing the ineffable scenes of images in the triclinium chamber. Although the triclinium is more open than the prior passageway, it is nonetheless a relatively tight and confined space with a low ceiling that likely only allowed around half a dozen people to contemplate the images without overly pressing in on one another.[421] The architectural layout and its affinity for the gloom lend themselves to multi-perspectival viewing. From a distance—looking from the initial corridor at the frescoes in the triclinium chamber—viewers would have thought they saw a familiar host of deities such as Isis, Nephthys, and Anubis. However, their appearance was likely uncertain due to the shadows. Viewers thus draw closer, exposing the images

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[419] Venit, "The Tomb from Tigrane," 712.

[420] Achille Adriani, *Repertorio d'arte dell'Egitto greco-romano ser. C*, (Palermo: Fondazione "Ignazio Mormino" del Banco di Sicilia, 1966), pl. 66, fig. 223.

[421] The author's memory of being in the space July 2018.

to the glow of lamplight and discerning details that reveal a series of masked actors; that is, men disguised as goddesses with prosthetic wings and serpent-scaled garments and women dressed as feathered serpents yet who don prosthetic beards. (The "true" identities of divinities are the priests and priestesses). At a distance, these painted costumes are themselves "cloaked" (ἐπικρύπτω) in darkness. Such cloaking fit the Greek imagination of the verb ἐπηλυγάζω, which not only meant to "overshadow" or "throw a shade over" but also to "disguise." Yet when viewers analyzed the images closely in the light of their lamps, they discerned that the "true" identity of divinities was the priests themselves. Darkness pertains to the realm of artifice, while the mystery's truth is discerned in the light, albeit as an unstable flame that flickers in the gloom. As guild members, moreover, contemplated imagery of death and resurrection above the final resting place of their deceased friends, this too likely held forth hope. In Egyptian religion, spells not only sought to reanimate the flesh but also to enhance its mobility and even granted the deceased the powers of flight.[422] Like a feathered serpent, the dead would magically put on new skins; they would rise from the tomb and take flight wherever their heart so desired (For afterlife beliefs about metamorphosis and the heart's desire see below: "Within Crocodile Skin, Part 2: Masquerading the Deceased as Deities.") Most broadly, this space offers one further transformation. Within this theatre of shadows, spectators experienced a mysterious flickering perception of the divine within the underworld's gloom, where bodily identities are ever uncertain and subject to change.

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[422] Flight and mobility are frequently referenced in Egyptian funerary papyri dating to the Greco-Roman era. Mark Smith, *Traversing Eternity: Texts for the Afterlife from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 434, 476, 581, 621, 624, 668 (among many other references).

Phenomenological Implications of an Anubis Mask

In ancient Egypt, Anubis masks were used as part of Egyptian funerary rituals. Still, during the Greco-Roman period, the cult of Isis also used them as part of public processions and likely for initiation rituals. Although mummy masks fill museums across the globe, the surviving evidence for Anubis masks is minimal. At the moment, three extant Anubis masks have survived from antiquity. The oldest jackal mask dates to c. 1292 — 1189 BCE **[Figure 4.7]**. The wooden mask has an open back and movable jaw that could be manipulated from the inside, and it fits directly over the face so that the wearer could see directly out of the eyeholes. Two others from approximately 600 – 300 BCE have closed backs and are made of solid ceramic.[423] For instance— as it relates to the mask that is now housed at the Pelizaeus Museum in Hildesheim —the artist has fashioned the mask out of terracotta and painted an Anubis whose face and ears are characteristically black and who wears a gold and black striped headdress. At the same time, two mysterious holes are located just below the jackal's muzzle at the neckline **[Figure 4.8].**

At least one scholar has argued that the Hildesheim mask was not even a mask since its eye-holes are placed at the neck level, and it weighs a striking seventeen pounds. Elsewhere, another scholar positively identifies it as a mask yet hedges whether these holes were meant for the eyes or not. [424] Yet one wonders if our Western assumptions

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[423] Robyn Adams Gillam, *Performance and Drama in Ancient Egypt* (London: Duckworth, 2005), 62. Deborah Sweeney, "Egyptian Masks in Motion," *Göttinger Miszellen* 135 (1993): 6.

[424] Christine Strauß, *Lexikon der Ägyptologie* II, col. 1198, note 6. For the equivocation see: Arelene Wolinski, "Egyptian Masks: The Priest and His Role," *Archaeology* 40 (1987): 24 (..."its eye holes are not where the jackal's eyes are, but down in the neck area instead."), 28 ("This striking example of a jackal mask representing Anubis was made of terracotta in a later period of Egyptian history. Unlike many earlier masks it has no eye holes"). Others accept the ceramic mask as genuine: Sweeney, "Egyptian Masks in

about masks have led to an inaccurate conclusion. We may expect the actor's eyes to neatly align with the space the mask allots for fictive eyes, and we assume that masks should be a lightweight screen for the face with an open back that is easily separated from the rest of the outfit. By contrast, the Anubis mask functions more like many West African masks that Phillis Galembo's photographs have so eloquently captured. Such masks are often more like costumes made of a mass of materials that often look ponderous. The materials of the mask's "face" are often connected to other parts of the body, even as the mask dissimulates appearances by granting the wearer hieratic scale; that is, the mask's fictive face sits atop the actor's head (like a "hat"), who peers through tiny eye-holes at the neck-space. One antelope mask from Nigeria, for example, situates the wearer's eyes so that the wearer spies out through the animal's neck **[Figure 4.16]**. (And note its formal echoes with ancient Anubis disguises.) There are hosts of other examples of masquerades through which the wearer's face is occluded at the region of the neck: Sometimes, the disguises are anthropomorphic, as a fictive face sits on top of the actor's face, which hides behind bundles of cloths. Sometimes leaf-covered actors tower above their natural height as trees, often carrying about their bodies a hulking mass of organic matter. Other times one sees zoomorphic countenances that extend high above the actor's head, as the mask's appearances echo the animal-headed deities of ancient Egypt. Human heads are replaced by the heads of antelopes, goats, leopards, crocodiles, deer, dogs, and many others.[425] In theoretical terms, the Hildesheim Anubis mask need

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Motion," 102; Ronald Leprohon, "Ritual Drama in Ancient Egypt," in *The Origins of Theater in Ancient Greece and Beyond: From Ritual to Drama*, ed. Eric Csapo and Margaret C. Miller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 270.

[425] Phyllis Galembo and Chika Okeke-Agulu, *Maske* (New York, NY: Aperture, 2010), 35, 57, 67, 69, 74-75, 79, 95, 111, 113-115, 137-141, 147,

not be excluded from the corpus of ancient Egyptian masks, even if it does not fit a Western horizon of expectations.

Other evidence supports the idea that the Hildesheim mask was once worn. One relief at the temple of Hathor at Dendera, for instance, depicts a priest wearing an Anubis mask, which roughly mimics the form of the terra-cotta mask **[Figure 4.9]**. The image uses "false transparency" to show a priest secreted within the mask as he gazes through Anubis's neck. Yet the priest's gate and gaze seem limited and uncertain as he waffles forward under the guidance of an attendant.[426] In another example, a three-handled jug with relief medallions, dating to the late second or early third century CE, one sees the carnival parade of the cult of Isis.[427] Members of the cult propelled a handcart forward, filled with Isis's cult statue, or else a priestess (or priest) dressed as Isis herself. At the head of the procession, one sees a priest, who is likely wearing an Anubis mask: he dwarfs the mortals around him, whose own heads only reach the shoulders and neckline of this super-sized jackal god. (Again, we recall Apuleius's description of the masked Anubis whose head towered above the crowd.)

What would it have been like to wear such a mask? Arlene Wolinksi actually had the opportunity to wear the aforementioned heavy terracotta mask. She remarked:

> The mask fit easily over my head, and balanced well on my shoulders with the weight of the terracotta distributing itself across my shoulders and back. Padded clothing would have better cradled the mask. The eye holes for the mask were in the long neck area, and

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[426] The Dendera relief has been noted for some time, though the most contextualized description so far is that by Leprohon: Leprohon, "Ritual Drama in Ancient Egypt," 269. Cf. Wolinksi "Egyptian Masks: The Priest and His Role,' 24-26; Sweeney, "Egyptian Masks in Motion," 102; Gillam, "Performance and Drama in Ancient Egypt," 133.

[427] Three-handled jug with relief medallions (including a depiction of an Isis parade), terracotta; Rhône Valley ware, late 2nd–early 3rd century CE, Roman, Arausio, southern France, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, inv. no. 17.194.87, online: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/250096

> not where the actual jackal's eyes on the mask would be expected. I could see out although my peripheral vision was limited. The eye holes were in the correct place for a person wearing the mask. There were air vents near the ears of the mask, and in the nostrils. So, the mask was about one foot higher than your head, and it would have made the priest wearing the mask more visible to the crowds watching a procession, and elevate him from the surrounding priests.[428]

Wolinski's experiment gave her embodied knowledge that this mask could have been actually worn by an ancient Egyptian priest. From her description, moreover, we can extrapolate that the mask not only occluded the crowd's sight of the priest inside the mask but also limited the priest's vision of himself and the crowds all around him. Debora Sweeney's own experimental archaeological creation of a Sobek mask (of the "helmet" type) revealed limited eyesight, remarking that she ceased to see any indication of her body or feet. Similarly, as priests donned this terra-cotta Anubis mask, they likely would have ceased to see their bodies, as the self's vision faded in favor of the sight of crowds venerating the arrival of a deity. [429] Wolinski also remarked that this type of mask created an image of Anubis's face that stood roughly a foot above one's head, making the deity more visible than the rest of the priests in the procession. Yet this height was likely not simply a practical concern related to the visibility of the main actor in the parade, but rather part of the enchantment of seeing a divinity walking among mortals in a hieratic scale. Viewers were likely awestruck by this walking, talking icon of deity with superhuman height. Here we should recall the relief at Dendera, where an attendant is needed to guide the priest, who wears a hefty Anubis mask and slowly totters forward [**Figure 4.9**]. This relief demonstrates that Egyptians were aware of the instabilities of wearing heavy ceramic masks that limited the wearer's field of vision. Although Egyptian

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[428] Arlene Wolinski, "Ancient Egyptian Ceremonial Masks," *Discussions in Egyptology* 6 (1986): 48. Wolinksi "Egyptian Masks: The Priest and His Role,' 26.
[429] Sweeney, "Egyptian Masks in Motion," 102-103. Cf. Gillam, "Performance and Drama in Ancient Egypt," 137-148.

artisans likely did not purposely design such masks to be unstable, the masked priest's slow, shaky movements might have had an emotional impact on viewers. For example, when Apuleius refers to such a procession, he describes the masked Anubis with the verb *horreo*; meaning to "move in an unsteady, shaking manner" but also to appear "dreadful" or "terrible," or to cause one to "tremble, shudder, or quake" with fear. The duality of fear and trembling also occurred in Middle Egyptian: *nḥꜣ* (as a verb) could mean "shake," but as an adjective *nḥꜣ* could also describe something as "terrible" or "alarming." [430] Although Wolinski has sought to demystify the ceramic mask by emphasizing its practicality (protection against foul smells, keeping the priest's identity secret, etc.), the mask's instability (an impracticality) may have contributed to the feeling of awe that spectators felt as they witnessed the "god" walking among mortals.

Within Crocodile Skin, Part 1: Modern Receptions and Archeological Context.

One of the strangest objects in the British Museum is a garment made from crocodile skins **[Figures 4.11-13]**. At some point during the third century CE, a human body once donned the appearance of one of the Nile's great reptilian dreads. Curatorial work has revealed that the intended effect necessitated the sacrifice of two crocodiles, whose skins were not tanned into leather but were harvested and shortly afterward placed in the shade, where a salty covering extricated bodily fluids to harden and "immortalize" the flesh. The tiny golden scales that softly glint about the wearer's skull and nape indicate that this skin once belonged to a young crocodile. This scaly "halo" contrasts with the mud-dark hide and thick reptilian plates that flesh out the rest of the vestment,

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[430] See prior citation of *Metamorphoses* 11.11. *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "*horreo*"; *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, s. v. "*nḥꜣ*."

revealing what was once the single body of some old leathery croc. The latter's forelegs were amputated from the very location where human arms would later emerge from the vestment's final form.[431] This likely indicates that the crocodile suit's construction was not haphazard, merely aesthetic or just functional. Instead, I suggest that it was designed to merge two beings — human and crocodile – into a single transformed existence.

In 1846 a certain Mrs. Andrews—wife of the recently-deceased-draftsmen Edward James Andrews (1810-1841)—presented the vestment to the museum, shortly after Edward Andrews acquired them from the "crocodile pits" in Maabdeh, close to modern Manfalut in Middle Egypt.[432] It has been claimed that the skins did not take their present form during the nineteenth century but were rolled up into pieces and brittle fragments and thus kept in storage until the 1980s.[433] However, accounts from nineteenth-century visitors often describe seeing the skins on display, so the skins likely fell into disrepair sometime during the early or mid-20th century. By the 1980s British Museum curators painstakingly softened the fragments and restored them to their current appearance. According to Barbara Wills, a specialist in organic artifacts, we can be fairly confident about this reconstruction since "Flexible organic objects often retain a 'memory' of the shape they had during their 'working' life." Nonetheless, curators noticed that the skins remembered two prior lives when they pertained to a living animal

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[431] Barbara Wills, "A Review of the Conservation Treatment of a Romano-Egyptian Cuirass and Helmet made from Crocodile Skin," *The Conservator* 24 (2000): 80-81.

[432] Ian Jenkins, "Ian Jenkins Investigates New Life for an Old 'Croc,'" *British Museum Magazine* 6 (1991): 7. For further details regarding the crocodile pits see: Brent Nongbri, "The Crocodile Pit of Maabdeh, Florence Nightingale, and the British Museum's Acquisition of the Harris Homers," *The Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 54 (2017): 207-17.

[433] "The mishappen, rolled-up pieces and fragments of the armor had been in storage since their acquisition in the 19th century." Wills, "A Review of the Conservation," 80.

and a work of art: "As the reshaping progressed, it became apparent that the cuirass "remembered," it had been a crocodile before it had been a garment; it would have readily allowed itself to be restored again to a crocodile shape."[434]

How should this coat of crocodile skin best be understood? And how would the vestment have been used in its original context? Since the nineteenth century, scholars have consistently characterized it as "armor." Consider, for instance, a reference found in John George Wood's 1863 book titled *The Illustrated Natural History*:

> The plates which cover the skin of the Crocodile are of exceeding hardness, so hard, indeed, that they are employed as armor by some ingenious warriors. A coat of natural scale armor formed from the Crocodile skin may be seen in the British Museum. Even a rifle ball may be turned by these horny plates, provided that it strikes rather obliquely; and they are impervious to ordinary steel weapons. Modern rifles, however, especially if the ball is hardened with solder or tin, make little account of the plates, but cut their way through them without difficulty."[435]

Wood's description characterizes the crocodile skin in the British Museum as a "coat of natural scale armor"; one that could protect feral crocodiles from old-fashioned rifle balls (or even steel blades) and which certain unidentified warriors donned in battle. Elsewhere, nineteenth-century sources employed martial parlance to describe the wearable skins (e.g. as "armor," a "suit of armor," or "a cuirass and helmet in one, formed of the "plate-armor" of the crocodile.").[436] After its reconstruction in the 1980s it was

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[434] Wills, "A Review of the Conservation," 83, 85.
[435] John G. Wood, *The Illustrated Natural History* (London: Warne Routledge, 1859), 29.

[436] It seems that during the nineteenth century the crocodile skins were located among Egyptian objects rather than Greco-Roman antiquities and categorized as "armor." The earliest reference is likely the record of Andrews's donation: Parliament, "Accounts and Papers: Finance," *Parliamentary Papers* 34 (1847): 11 ("A Suit of Armor made of the Skin of a Crocodile, several Crocodile Mummies, and sepulchral Vases, presented by Mrs. Andrews."); The British Museum, *Synopsis of the Contents of the British Museum: Department of Oriental Antiquities : First and Second Egyptian Rooms* (London: The British Museum, 1874), 41 (In cases 38-39 it mentions, "Armor made from the skin of the crocodile."); Francis T. Buckland, *Curiosities of Natural History* (New York: Rudd & Carleton, 1860), 60 ("a suit of armor — from ancient Egypt, I believe – made to fit a man, and composed entirely of crocodile skin."); Thomas Nichols, *A*

then characterized as "military-style cuirass and helmet," that Roman soldiers associated with the Manfalut garrison, donned as "a parade suit for special ceremonial, that is to say cult, occasions."[437] John Taylor, a curator at the British Museum, admits that we still do not actually understand the object's intended purpose. He thus leaves the question open and ponders whether it "may have been put on by priests when they were carrying out rituals in connection with crocodile deities," or used by a Roman soldier during warfare to deflect weapons. ("... It is interesting to wonder whether a Roman soldier wearing metal armor fighting one wearing crocodile armor would be likely to win or not."). The artist Fowokan George Kelly, drawing upon African beliefs, takes a different approach to the priestly and the warrior theories, respectively; opining that priests may have worn the crocodile garment to "take on the spirit of the deity," or "a warrior might be transformed in some magical way to take on the attributes of the animal."[438]

While the warrior and priestly theories are interesting, the evidence that has been cited is currently insufficient to support them. For instance, while a priest may have once worn the skins, no one has yet supplied visual or textual sources to back up this claim. Moreover, just because Rome ruled Egypt and there was a Roman garrison stationed in Manfalut, it does not necessarily lead to the conclusion that a "soldier" wore this outfit, much less used it in battle. Indeed, we do not even know whether any "Roman" donned

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Handy-Book of the British Museum: For Every-Day Readers (London: Cassel, Petter and Galpin, 1870), 137-138 (The author cites a whole list of Egyptian weapons and armor in the British Museum, including, "a cuirass and helmet in one, formed off the "plate-armor" of the crocodile.").

[437] Jenkins, "New Life for an Old "Croc," 7.
[438] Both Taylor and Kelly's statements are found at: John Taylor, "Ancient Egypt: Crocodile-skin Suit of Armour," Museum of the World (British Museum with Google Cultural Institute), cited 3/10/2022; https://britishmuseum.withgoogle.com/object/crocodile-skin-suit-of-armour

this suit. In what follows, I explore for the first time how native Egyptian sources might help us better understand this object, which I contend was created with metamorphic intent, especially in the context of mummification.

The story of the discovery of the crocodile skins has not yet been fully told, but its details can yield clues relating to this object. Edward James Andrews (1810-1841), an artist under the employ of the Egyptologist Howard Vyse (1784 – 1853), is said to have retrieved the vestment from the so-called "crocodile grottoes" (or the "Grotto of Samoun") in Maabdeh near Manfalut, likely sometime during the 1830s.[439] Travelers like Andrews were magnetized to the caves after the location became a public sensation: two local guides had died as part of Thomas Leigh's expedition, and while the latter claimed it was due to the cavern's noxious and suffocating air, the local Arab population decried the deaths as an act of murder. Thomas Leigh escaped Egypt with his life, published his account (which sought to defend his innocence), and warned readers of the cavern's perils. At the same time, the story galvanized European curiosity through his descriptions of this strange underground labyrinth filled with gleaming stalactites, armies of bats, putrid air strangling torches, and a wondrous horde of crocodile and human mummies.[440] One roughly contemporary image conveys a general representation of the caves **[Figure 4.17**]: one sees a European traveler and several Arab guides, who gaze upon a gilded coffin in astonishment, while the environment is strewn with the corpses of crocodiles of

[439] Author unknown, biographical entry for "Edward James Andres," The British Museum, cited 3/10/2022, online: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG52957?id=BIOG52957&page=3

[440] Primary: Thomas Legh, *Narrative of a Journey in Egypt and the Country beyond the Cataracts* (London: John Murray, 1816), 109-116; secondary: Tessa Baber, "Early Travellers and the Animal 'Mummy Pits' of Egypt: Exploration and Exploitation of the Animal Catacombs in the Early Age of Travel," in *Creatures of Earth, Water, and Sky: Essays on Animals in Ancient Egypt and Nubia*, ed. Stéphanie Porcier, Salima Ikram, and Stéphane Pasquali (Leiden: Sidestone, 2019), 73-74.

all sizes, sometimes only in fragmentary form. It was this setting that attracted Andrews to Manfalut, who not only recovered crocodile skins but brought numerous crocodile mummies from the grottoes home to England. However, Andrews could not enjoy his newly found curiosities for long, as he died shortly after his return at the young age of thirty-one. Soon afterward, his wife donated his Egyptian artifacts to the British Museum, originally described as "A Suit of Armor made of the Skin of a Crocodile, several Crocodile Mummies, and sepulchral Vases, presented by Mrs. Andrews."[441] Although the crocodile skin vestment has not yet been studied from the perspective of mummification and Egyptian religion, the archaeological evidence points in this direction.

Within Crocodile Skin, Part 2: Masquerading the Deceased as Deities

From the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts to Egyptian funerary papyri during the Roman era, Egyptians imagined that the deceased could undergo various transformations in the afterlife, provided they had been mummified and the right spells had been conferred. The dead could take the form of numerous animals (jackal, falcon, scarab, etc.) and become assimilated to various deities, often manifesting themselves through zoomorphic appearances. Such newly fashioned bodies granted the deceased a vast range of magical abilities and benefits (flight, swimming underwater, ferocity and strength, communion with divinities, and mobility to leave the tomb and wander the world).[442]

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[441] Parliament, "Accounts and Papers," 11. See also the objects associated with Edward's donation: Author unknown, biographical entry for "Edward James Andres," The British Museum, cited 3/10/2022, online: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG52957?id=BIOG52957&page=3

[442] Mark Smith, *Traversing Eternity: Texts for the Afterlife from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt*, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 610, 614-615.

What about crocodile transformations? Consider, for instance, one visual parallel that pertains to a funerary context **[Figure 4.14].** Depicted on the lid of the coffin of Ankhruty (XXX dynasty, c. 380–343 BCE), the deceased takes the corporeal form of a scale-covered crocodilian body with a human countenance and a headdress. One can imagine that the deceased who once wore the crocodile vestment in the British Museum would have appeared similarly, except that the crocodile flesh would have composed the headdress instead of the tail. Here the accompanying inscription describes the dead possessing many faces, that is, various metamorphic possibilities, including the ability to become like Osiris and Sobek (deities who take anthropomorphic and crocodilian forms).[443] Elsewhere, The Papyrus of Ani (c. 1250 BCE), perhaps the most well-known copy of the Book of the Dead, has a chapter that describes explicitly the deceased, as Osiris, undergoing a crocodile-metamorphosis ("The Chapter of Changing into a Crocodile.") Among other things, the deceased states "I am the crocodile which dwells within terror, I am the sacred crocodile and I cause destruction."[444] Interest in Sobek, the crocodile deity, only increased during the Greco-Roman era in regions like Manfalut, and especially the watery Faiyum, which Greeks termed "Crocodilopolis" ("Crocodile City," Κροκοδειλόπολις).[445] One first-century funerary text called the "Book of Transformations," for instance, utters the following spell for the dead:

> You will transform yourself into a crocodile, at rest or swimming upstream. You will accomplish all that you desire. Your strength will be great. You will slay those with evil

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[443] Marco Zecchi, "Osiris in the Fayyum," in *Fayyum Studies*, ed. Sergio Pernigotti and Marco Zecchi (Bologna: Alma Mater Studiorum, 2006), 134-135.

[444] E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani in the British Museum* (New York: Dover Publications, 1967), xxxviii, 337.

[445] Maria Galuzina, "The God Sobek in Ptolemaic and Roman Times: A Confrontation of the Cult of Sobek in Krokodilopolis and Kom Ombo" (BA thesis, Univerzita Karlova v Praze, 2016), 9.

> hearts. You will cut off the heads of your foes, remaining powerful in every form of yours. You will travel upstream on every way, in possession of fairwinds. You will receive sustenance on each bank.[446]

The spell has a genie-like function, granting whatever desire the deceased can imagine: rest or conflict, strength or nourishment, and defeating the terrors of *rigor mortis* through aquatic mobility. All comforts can be enjoyed, and all afterlife-dangers retreat before the noble dead's terrible reptilian form. Moreover, had the artist who created the crocodile skins for a human body known of such spells, then the very process of creating this *msk*ꜣ may have had magical force: making incisions and amputating crocodile appendages endowed the skins with the apotropaic potency to "cut off the heads of your foes, remaining powerful in every form of yours."

Not only was the metamorphosis of the deceased brought about through sacred spells, but also through elaborate mummification rituals. Such rites were not simply intended to alter the forms of the deceased but also their substance.[447] At this point, it will be helpful to describe the mummification process more generally before exploring the particular evidence of crocodile-style mummification in more depth.

A complete mummification ritual lasted seventy days. As Salima Ikram's experimental mummifications have shown, this period was not purely magical and symbolic. Even with the aid of the scorching Egyptian sun, embalmers would need to return to the corpse daily with bags of natron salts to desiccate the body. A similar process would have likely been used to curate the crocodile hide that once enveloped the

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[446] Smith, "Traversing Eternity," 622.

[447] Salima Ikram, "Mummies and Mummification," in The Encyclopedia of Ancient History, ed. Roger S. Bagnall, et al. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2013), 1.

deceased in Maabdeh. The embalmers worked against time, or rather the invisible legions of bacteria that sought to putrefy the flesh and the ever-visible hosts of flies, worms, and other vermin that relentlessly sought to make a meal of the body. After many days of work, depending on the size of the body, the corpse was sufficiently desiccated to inhibit it from rotting. At this point, however, the body became so brittle that it could not be manipulated, bandaged, and placed in a coffin without shattering at some points. So the embalmers gently painted the corpse with natural oils, returning daily to the same task until skin and cartilage had been thoroughly permeated and could now be moved about with ease. Near the end of the embalming ritual, human hands enshrined the corpse in a cocoon-like covering of semitransparent resins of a yellowish hue. Likely the last thing the embalmers saw before applying the mummification wrappings was a body that now seemed immune to putrefaction, the terrors of eternal immobility, and now glowed as if in a transfigured state. [448]

However, before the mummy's metamorphosis could be complete, it first had to be animated through the opening of the mouth ceremony. During the procession to the tomb, relatives and priests would mourn by smiting their chests, tearing fabric, and raising ululating cries of anguish. It was in front of the tomb that the opening of the mouth ceremony took place. One priest donned a leopard's skin and offered incense; another wore a jackal mask in imitation of the underworld deity, Anubis. The latter

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[448] Salima Ikram, *Divine Creatures: Animal Mummies in Ancient Egypt,* (Cairo: American University in Cairo press, 2015), 6; Ikram, "Mummies and Mummification," 1; For the process of mummification in more detail see: Salima Ikram and Aidan Dodson, *The Mummy in Ancient Egypt: Equipping the Dead for Eternity* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1998), 166-192.

animated the senses of the deceased, endowing the ba with the ability to breathe upon the corpse at night.[449]

Even if the process of mummification had physically altered the body and rituals had altered its imagined sensory capacities, death had still robbed the body of its original beauty. The ambition of Egyptian minds was not simply to restore the body to its youthful state but to transform it into the image of the gods. Thus, artisans fashioned masks for the hosts of the transfigured dead, which refigured their countenances into a divine appearance.[450] From the painted mummy coffins of the Old Kingdom to King Tutankhamun's golden visage, until the last gilded cartonnage mummy masks of the second century CE, masks deified the deceased through a kind of corporeal alchemy. Rather than fashioning a mask of pure gold, masks were often made of cartonnage and gilded with gold, affixed with precious materials, or painted simulations of the latter.[451]

In the Roman period, the gilded masks from Hawara present some of the best examples of the earlier Pharaonic tradition. Sometimes the final effect is unsettling, as when the eyes glisten as if Mareis, a man who died around 20-40 CE, seems to peer out to us from his mask as if animate still, buried yet alive **[Figure 4.10]**. In such cases, the layering of materials attendant upon mummification seems to envision a gradual transition of the deceased newly fashioned body: from flesh to moist resins, to linen

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[449] Ikram and Dodson, *The Mummy in Ancient Egypt*, 16-17.

[450] John H. Taylor, "Masks in Ancient Egypt: The Image of Divinity," in *Masks and the Art of Expression*, ed. John Mack (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1994), 168-189, esp. 171, 189; Ikram, "Mummies and Mummification," 1, 3. Cf. depictions of animal-headed deities as an iconographic vision of metamorphic powers: Assmann, *Death and Salvation*, 71.

[451] Ikram, "Mummies and Mummification," 1-3. Cf. precious materiality mentioned in primary sources: Smith, *Traversing Eternity*, 346, 370, 372, 376.

wrappings, to the mask's inner layer of cartonnage, to the mask's golden skin and the gleam of limestone and obsidian eyes, the deceased gradually transfigures into a divine body.

During the Roman period, there is evidence that some human mummies were made to look like crocodiles. Although it is rare for crocodile-skin vestments to survive, we know that the Maabdeh crocodile-skins were not a one-off artistic production since another example is also found in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Berlin. The latter, however, is more fragmentary, only preserves a head-covering wrought of crocodile hide, and dates roughly to the fourth century.[452] Even though time has likely destroyed most of the physical evidence of such crocodile skins, overlooked textual descriptions nonetheless paint in the mind's eye a vivid picture of what a mummified priest wearing crocodile skins would have looked like. Consider, for instance, the words of The Embalming Ritual, which were given to an Egyptian priest named Hatres, who lived during the first or second centuries CE. The ritual describes how the deceased's body and back should be slathered in holy ointment, and then the body should be laid on its back just as the deceased had slept during life. Afterward the corpse was then given a special mummified garment that was evocative of a divine crocodile. ("When you turn his face upwards, his back coated with oil, [apply] the bandage of Sobek the Crocodilopolite.")[453] The text then provides the words that should be recited as part of this ceremony. They speak of the rejuvenating anointments, which cover the corpse as the perspiration of various deities (Re, Shu, Osiris), and refer again to the crocodile covering: "[to you] will

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[452] Wills, "A Review of the Conservation," 80.
[453] Smith, *Traversing Eternity*, 227.

come the vestment of Sobek the Crocodilopolite. It will cover your body like the primeval ocean. You will receive your clothing, namely the precious vestment." Then the body is encrusted with amulets and a treasure-trove of materials (gold, silver, lapis lazuli, turquoise) as the spells continue: "Faience will come to you in order to make your visage shine, and red jasper to encompass your movements." [454] Moreover, each fingernail and toenail is said to be plated with gold and electrum. One final passage (again) mentions the crocodile vestment. "The fabric from the house of Sobek will come to you. It will lead the way in the ancient ocean. It will refresh and regenerate your body, you being like Re, rising and setting without cease, eternally."[455]

Throughout this chapter, I have employed various terms such as "mask," "costume," "vestment," and the like. While I have done so to provide clarity to modern readers, such terms continually imply that what one is witnessing is an artificial appearance, reminding us that humans cannot become crocodiles in reality. This tendency to distinguish between the real and the artificial is part of the rationalism that is freighted with Western vocabulary. Yet such an understanding of the crocodile skins would have likely seemed foreign to ancient Egyptians. The skins were, after all, not merely a means of representing a crocodile but a way to step inside an actual crocodilian body. In addition to the term *msk*ꜣ ("skin"), Egyptians may have described this as *ḏt*, which meant both "body" and "image"; that is, the wearer would have been imagined as an embodied

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[454] Smith, *Traversing Eternity*, 228.

[455] Smith, *Traversing Eternity*, 229.

image of Sobek, which was enchanted with the supernatural powers afforded to a crocodile-deity.[456]

All taken together, the overall picture of the deceased exceeds the bounds of nature by admixing natural forms and materials in supernatural combinations. The mummy's human face and body are encrusted with colorful stones, the skin gleams with ointment, the nails radiate with gold and electrum, and all about, one sees a corpse ensconced within in the dark-plated scales of a crocodile. The Egyptian vision of the crocodile-dead is aesthetically akin to Western folklore's fantasies of dragons whose bellies coruscate with jewels, though the myths are naturally distinct. The masks of the sacred crocodiles pampered in sacred temples offer a better parallel **[Figure 4.15].** In one example, we see a mask made of wood, the face gleams with golden skin, its jagged teeth flash a knowing grin, and its eyes (now lost) likely were inset with celestial-colored stones. In the end, the crocodile skin deifies the deceased as Sobek (often conflated with Osiris) and covers the body with the charismatic force of the primordial ocean. The deceased is thus endowed with a litany of abilities such as terrible strength, guidance, regenerative power, and aquatic mobility. The latter attribute ensured that the deceased's masked performance would continue well into the eternities.

Conclusion

This chapter breaks from traditional accounts of Greco-Roman visual metamorphosis by considering a more expansive understanding of the artistic representation of mythical transformation. As Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* makes apparent,

[456] *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian*, s. v. "*ḏt*"

Roman tales about metamorphosis were not confined to a standard list of Greek myths (Europa and the Bull, Leda and the Swan, etc.), nor canonical arts like painting and sculpture. Within the mixed cultural setting of the ancient Mediterranean and North Africa, the Greco-Roman cultural imagination absorbed aspects of Egyptian religion (among other foreign cults). In considering the frescoes at the Tigran Tomb, Anubis masks, and wearable crocodile skins, I have also argued for an ampler definition of the metamorphic image; one that takes in masquerading human bodies as embodied icons of supernatural change. For ancient subjects, such masquerades were not simply the quest for aesthetically attractive fashions, nor did observers (or wearers) likely experience these disguises with a distant air of logical appreciation. In the Egyptian imagination, masquerades produced mysterious transformations. In the case of the Tigrane Tomb, ordinary materials and experiences were changed into an enchanted perception of the gods in the flickering gloom. In the darkened space, one's perceptions were uncertain: did the viewer glimpse images of disguised actors or the very gods themselves? The ceramic Anubis mask not only witnesses the transformation of a priest into a god, but it prompts questions about the relationship between truth and artifice, the mask and its interior, bodily appearance and the soulful presence. In the case of the crocodile skins from the British Museum, we have seen how modern rationalist assumptions can sometimes misunderstand Egyptian objects. I have argued that the skins should not be characterized as a Roman soldier's "armor"— but as contemporary funerary papyri attest — these skins likely enveloped the mummified body of an Egyptian priest. From the Papyrus of Ani (c. 1250 BCE) to Roman-era funerary papyri, one finds funerary spells that sought to transform the deceased into a crocodile. Here rationalistic distinctions between the real

and the fictive do not fully appreciate the skins since the relevant terminology of *msk*ꜣ meant "skin," while an "image" ("*ḏt*") was also a "body." The priest did not wear a "costume" but inhabited a new crocodilian body and thus transformed into an image of Sobek. Such divine skins also were imagined as a talisman. They regenerated the body, conferred oceanic power, aquatic mobility, supernatural strength, and the force to "cut off the heads of your foes." (Here, one wonders whether the creation of this outfit—cutting and sewing the skins—had magical significance since the crocodilian power could “cut” down enemies). In any case, the skins should be characterized less like a soldier’s strong leather armor and more like a magical weapon that could be used against supernatural enemies. For Greco-Roman rationalists — who espoused anthropocentric worldviews — it is easy to see why Egyptian cults were often the object of scorn. The Egyptian religious imagination fully embraced beliefs in divine animality, its visual culture willing "changed" humans into zoomorphic bodies, and it reveled in the affective enchantments that come with magical worldviews.

DISSERTATION CONCLUSION

This dissertation's purpose was to uncover the ancient "metamorphic imagination": the artistic representation of supernatural change in the natural world and the perception of such changes. It is an expansive study of metamorphic imagery, both chronologically and culturally. It includes Greco-Roman and Egyptian images and texts that span the Mediterranean and North Africa, most of which date from Hellenistic Greece to just before the rise of Christianity as a significant political force (c. 300 BCE to 300 CE). In some cases, I also drew attention to comparisons from earlier eras to better contextualize the main areas of inquiry.

Here it is worth mentioning this dissertation's limitations and potential areas of future inquiry. First, although I often situated my artistic case studies within the *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, this study does not analyze the entire Greco-Roman corpus of images of metamorphosis. Future research would thus benefit from a comprehensive analysis of the corpus of metamorphic images in order to create a more detailed historical narrative. Second, no single kind of artwork (e.g., sculpture, paintings) is the sole focus of study. Instead, I have tried to capture some of the diversity of the metamorphic imagination by examining an eclectic range of objects (glyptics, sculptures, paintings, cups, animal skins, etc.). Objects were selected based on methodological relevance, as well as the constraints that the outbreak of COVID-19 put on travel. (Many of my objects come from well-photographed collections from major museums or sites like Wikimedia, where photographers often generously release their work to the public.) Third, for the most part, this dissertation has focused on the reception of images. Subsequent studies might investigate how artists created images of metamorphosis,

probing how this process was itself an act of transformation. Fourth, this dissertation does not consider the metamorphic imagination of early Christianity. In the future, I would like to build off of the iconographic studies of Thomas Matthews and Robin Jensen—as well as textual reassessments of Christian anthropocentrism — and expand this research into the domain of early Christian art.[457] Such a study would explore the afterlives of the contests between rationality and enchantment, reconsidering Christian attitudes towards species-crossing, object-metamorphosis, and the material wonders of visual art.

Despite these limitations, this study sheds new light on crucial dialectics of the metamorphic imagination, such as bodily change and soulful identity, rationality and enchantment, and the natural world and supernatural power. In so doing, it has departed from the dominant iconographic approaches by seeking answers to four critical questions. First, how might images enchant or disenchant a spectator's perceptions of metamorphosis? Examining this question is critical to understanding better the relationship between rationalism and mythical images in antiquity. Second, how did images depict body-spirit relationships during metamorphosis? For example, one need was to understand better how images prompted viewers to imagine the soul within (or outside) the skin. Another need was to explore how the metamorphic image could represent changes in substance through an image's materiality. Answering such questions

[457] For the shapeshifting Jesus of early Christian art, see Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003) 115-141; Robin Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000) 125-129; Robin Jensen, *Face to Face: Portraits of the Divine in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2004) 142-172; Robin Jensen, "The Polymorphous Jesus in Early Christian Image and Text," in eds. Arnhold, Marlis, Harry O. Maier, and Jörg Rüpke, *Seeing the God: Image, Space, Performance, and Vision in the Religion of the Roman Empire* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr Verlag, 2018) 150-175. For textual reassessments of animality and anthropocentrism in early Christianity, see Patricia Cox Miller, *In the Eye of the Animal: Zoological Imagination in Ancient Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Daniel Becerra, "Asceticism and the Other: Angels and Animals in the Egyptian Ascetic Tradition" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2019).

adds art historical insight to broader philosophical questions about the mind-body problem in antiquity. Third, how was supernatural change related to philosophies about changes in the natural environment? Since metamorphosis involves environmental transformations (into flora, fauna, landscape, or elemental substances), exploring this question is critical if we are to better understand and contextualize metamorphic representation. Fourth, what role did Egypt and its masquerades play in the history of the metamorphic image? This question was prompted by Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, which situates the visual culture of metamorphosis within the masquerades of the Egyptian Isis cult. Exploring this inquiry provides a more accurate appreciation of the metamorphic image as a multicultural phenomenon. Although this dissertation has several threads of inquiry, these mostly weave together around the following thesis: that the metamorphic image was caught up in debates about the enchantment or disenchantment of the gods, bodies, and the natural world.

Ancient subjects' perceptions of the metamorphic image could be disenchanted through several artistic strategies: some images depended on visual ambiguities, the viewer's movements, or the subject's understanding of optics. Such techniques did not guarantee a skeptical interpretation of myth but opened up the possibility for rationalistic readings. For example, the Getty Leda (and others of its type) envisions a "swan" that is formally ambiguous and debatable. Some viewers might contend that it represents a traditional depiction of a divine swan. Others might adopt the position of Euripides, arguing that Leda holds a common swan, which a suitor gave her as a gift. Yet others could argue that the scene looked like a woman bathing with a fowl-shaped vessel, referencing well-known visual comparisons. In like manner, entirely anthropomorphic

images of Actaeon (surrounded by hounds) allowed for enchantment or disenchantment. Some viewers might have interpreted such images as a depiction of the moment just before his transformation. Others might have followed the lead of Pausanias, stating that no transformation actually took place. Instead, rabid hounds hallucinated a wild stag, which they attacked and devoured. We have also seen that doublings were a critical part of the linguistic and artistic imagination of doubt (Greek *distazō*, to take "a double-stance," Latin *dubito* “to have or hold, as two,” *ambiguitas* is something with a "double sense"). Writers like Pausanias (c. 110 CE — 180 CE) and Quintus Smyrnaeus (c. latter 4th century) disenchanted the "Niobe" on mount Sipylus through doublings: from a distance, the eyes saw a woman's semblance in stone, a closer inspection revealed nothing but the mountainside. Heraclitus used the same strategy to disenchant the centaur myth. Observing from a distance, the original eyewitnesses mistook "horse-men" for people riding on horseback. During Roman antiquity, it was common for artists to depict Actaeon's metamorphosis by visualizing his body in a hybrid form as a stag-man. Such depictions made it possible for rationalists to supply optical rationales for why Actaeon's hounds mistook him for a prey animal (e.g., the dogs misconstrued Actaeon's deerskin cloak for an actual deer, or they erroneously interpreted his upraised club and wild hair, as a stag's antlers.) Viewers who approached such images from a distance lost these visual nuances, which they could discern at close range. Metamorphic images could thus spark rationalistic interpretations of myth, not merely through iconographic means but by drawing attention to the fallibility of the human senses. The logic was that the mind's reasoning powers should be trusted above the testimony of mythical eyewitnesses or oral traditions that storytellers had passed down over the centuries.

By contrast, other images of transformation enticed viewers to revel in the irrational enchantments of Bacchic myth. Images of Pentheus and Lycurgus enticed viewers to imagine themselves taking part in the manias of myth. Viewers would see Pentheus as a man yet imitate the hallucinating maenads by imagining him in the form of a wild beast. In the case of the Greek red-figure cup, ritual practices and visual comparisons with the imagery inside the vessel could stimulate subjects to imagine the hallucination in the mind's eye. In the House of the Vettii, nearby images of mythical figures whose bodies were covered or overshadowed by animals could trigger a viewer's memory of zoomorphic delusions. Likewise, Lycurgus's vine-shackled body mirrors the snake-covered Laocoön (or young Hercules), as viewers imagine his flesh crawling with hallucinatory serpents. Symposiasts contemplated such images in altered states of consciousness as they succumbed to spells of intoxication. As observed in chapter three, such visual manias fit Michael Koortbojian's diagnosis of the imagination in Roman art. Rather than explicitly depicting myth's most uncouth or horrific aspects, artists often supplied visual cues so that viewers could choose to censor or relish in their imagination "mature content." Images of metamorphic manias thus transfer the work of representation to the medium of memory and imagination, luring spectators to perceive as if they were mythical characters whose minds had gone insane.

Artists produced the enchantments of metamorphic imagery partially by exploring body-spirit relationships. In some cases, images of metamorphosis envisioned changeable substances through their material effects. For example, one might hold a rock crystal statuette of Aphrodite in hand — see its transparent forms adopt the color of human skin — and wonder how this goddess had seemingly become actual flesh and blood. From the

Hellenistic era to the Roman Empire, we have also seen how transmitted light could alter the appearance of artistic materials, animating the strange and uncanny features of myth; whether these be the severing of the gorgon's head depicted in sardonyx or the transformations of a vine from green to red (e.g., the Farnese, Barber, and Lycurgus cups). Elsewhere, Greco-Roman subjects gazed at tiny sardonyx portraits through candlelight and imagined the sitter's soul glowing with the meteoric light of apotheosis. Tiny earthy stones have become objects of cosmic significance. This study has also demonstrated for the first time how Greco-Roman physiognomic culture encouraged imaginative "deep looking": viewers scrutinize corporeal clues to imagine divine souls hidden within animal flesh. Since the eyes are windows to the soul, spectators could imagine soulfulness behind the eyes of a metamorphic image. Moschus recounted that the gaze of a god in animal form could enchant the spectator. At the same time, visual artists depicted the eyes of Leda, Europa, and Ganymede mesmerized by the charms of Jupiter's gaze. However, not all metamorphic images represented the soul entirely through visual means. We have seen how rationalists clashed with believers over whether a human echo could be evidence of Echo's lost soul. Ancient myth-hunters perceived Echo's voice in the echoes of the wilderness, the murmuring sea, or reverberant architecture. By late antiquity, we encounter one of the most unsettling representations of the soul: the phantom of a bloodthirsty king envisioned on the inside of the Lycurgus cup. In such examples, artworks often enchanted the imagination through their sensory seductions and wondrous material qualities.

Another area of inquiry that this dissertation has explored is the intersection between supernatural change and change in the natural environment. For instance,

rationalists clashed with tradition over the natural environment's pareidolic phenomena. On the one hand, Lucretius railed the practice of imagining wilderness echoes and sounds as the presence of hidden mythical figures like Echo or satyrs. Others, like Pausanias and Quintus Smyrnaeus sought to disabuse the minds of spectators who saw "Niobe" on Sipylus' slopes. On the other hand, authors like Homer, Ovid, and Antoninus Liberalis, describe the widespread practice of discerning the presence of metamorphic myths through the chance imagery of the natural landscape or its haunting sounds. The metamorphic imagination was also not immune to broader philosophical debates about environmental change and motions. In the ancient world, many philosophers (Aristotelians, Platonists, Epicureans, and Stoics) considered change and movement nearly identical principles of the natural world. In this worldview, the four elements transformed into one another as they descended or ascended the cosmos in iterative cycles. The aether, a starry fifth element, mostly permeated celestial phenomena and the earth's upper atmosphere. Rationalist philosophers could thus explain changes in the natural world without needing supernatural or miraculous causes. Poetic and artistic representations of descending gods or ascending mortals often re-enchanted such philosophies of cosmic motion and elemental change. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, representations of transformation (e.g., descending gods, ascensions to apotheosis, Lycaon's flight) often occur as bodies move through space; however, magical or divine forces spark such transformations. Thus, Barkan has aptly characterized Ovid's poetic enterprise as one that "proves the natural world magical and the magical world

natural."[458]Ancient minds did not overlook the notion that physical movement might animate visual transformations. Sometimes the legerdemain of the hands created the appearance of transformation, especially when flickering candlelight changed the appearance of stone or glass (e.g., glyptics of apotheosis, the rock crystal Aphrodite, the Lycurgus cup). Other times the spectator's body could enchant or disenchant a metamorphic image (e.g., pareidolia, rationalist double-perspectives of mythical sculptures). In other cases, ancient subjects masqueraded in zoomorphic bodies, as mortals turned into walking, talking icons of mythical beasts and gods (e.g., Isis costumes, Dionysiac cups used as masks). The subject's embodiment and participatory movements often influenced the perception of transformation or helped dramatize the narrative of metamorphic myths.

Chapter four explored the metamorphic imagination as a multicultural phenomenon, focusing on Egyptian (and Egyptianizing) culture during the Greco-Roman era. It took its inspiration from book eleven of Apuleius' Metamorphoses, which employs an Isis masquerade as the site where an ass transforms back into a man. My visual case studies included Anubis masks, the Tigrane Tomb (Alexandria), and wearable crocodile skins. Such examples not only showed how Egyptian beliefs permeated the Roman imagination of transformation (e.g., the Tigrane Tomb) but expanded the study of metamorphic imagery beyond arts like painting and sculpture to include performative human bodies. I also pivoted away from the dominant approaches to such materials in

[458] Leonard Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 19.

two main ways. First, the chapter explored the mysterious and enchanting aspects of this visual culture. I argued that embodied icons prompted viewers and wearers to consider ideas related to truth and deception, the mask, and its interior. As in the case of the Tigrane frescoes—viewers entered the gloomy tomb under the vagaries of candlelight—and glimpsed how everyday materials and experiences changed into an enchanting and mysterious perception of the divine. The crocodile skins from the British Museum, moreover, witness how modern Western assumptions about Egyptian objects can mischaracterize them. Artisans did not create the skins as "armor" that a Roman soldier from the nearby garrison in Manfalut would use in battle. Rather, artisans likely created the skins to be worn by a deceased Egyptian priest; the skins being a magical charm that enveloped the deceased, granting the heart's desire, including the ability to metamorphose into a terrible crocodilian form.

Overall, this study narrates a new history of the metamorphic imagination. Starting with the Pre-Socratics like Heraclitus and extending to Epicureans and Stoics during Roman times, philosophers provided non-mythical explanatory causes for environmental change. Since bodies were part of a changeable natural world, they were logically subject to unstoppable changing forces. Some philosophers, like Aristotle, did not choose to condemn metamorphosis explicitly but implicitly shunned mythical explications of change in favor of philosophical rationales. Other ancient Greek authors lambasted metamorphic thinking outright. For Socrates, metamorphosis violated divine character: the changeability of Olympian gods would make deities into disreputable deceivers, wizards, or magicians. Another reason that metamorphosis offended rationalist sensibilities was that it violated anthropocentric worldviews and natural categories by

trespassing bodily boundaries like species, genders, or the mortal-immortal divide. In part, rationalist anthropocentrism helps explain its cultural allergy towards hybrids, species-crossing, and the wild animality of Egyptian cults. Moreover, metamorphosis involved miracles and supernatural phenomena that defied everyday experience. Overall, the rationalist approach to pareidolia, mythography, and image production, reveals a distrust in sensory-derived knowledge and openness to double-readings, challenging the testimonies of those who claimed to have seen or heard evidence of the miraculous. Beginning around the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, one finds interest in visual sources that advance rationalist interpretations (or are open to these possibilities). However—in line with Greta Haws's observations about rationalism in textual sources—one finds a renewed interest in visual rationalism roughly around the time of the Second Sophistic (c. 50 — 230 CE; see Chapter two, and the discussion of the Niobe pareidolon in chapter three).

Roughly during the era of the Second Sophistic (c. 50 — 230 CE), Roman artists created the most polarized approaches to the metamorphic representation. On the one hand, artists from this era created a concentration of metamorphic images that allowed for rationalist readings. Elite patrons seem to have commissioned some of these images, such as the anthropocentric Actaeon statue from the villa of Antoninus Pius, and the Getty Leda that was discovered at the Palatine Hill **[cf. Figures 2.3, 11-12]**. The popularity of the latter statue-type seems to indicate the relatively widespread interest in its potential for rationalistic readings. It was during this same time that one first finds evidence (via Pausanias) that travelers were disenchanting Sipylus' Niobe pareidolon through multi-perspectival viewing. On the other hand, artists during the Second Sophistic created some

of the most wondrous, wild, and unsettling images of Leda and the Swan. The latter enticed viewers to imagine divine souls occluded within strange bestial bodies, thus re-enchanting the philosophy of physiognomy. During the Roman empire, representations of Actaeon as an antler-growing hybrid achieve widespread acclaim. This development may indicate a more significant interest in the corporeal hybridity that rationalists found repulsive (see chapter two). The evidence from cups is also telling. From the red-figure cup's depiction of Pentheus to the wonders of Roman cups (Farnese, Barber, Lycurgus), there seems to be a shift toward the seductive charms of an image's materiality; how light might illuminate multicolored stones or dichroic glass to animate the most wondrous and unsettling features of metamorphic myths. The overall narrative seems to indicate that during Roman antiquity, attitudes toward the metamorphic image polarized, as subjects contested the disenchantments and enchantments of myth.

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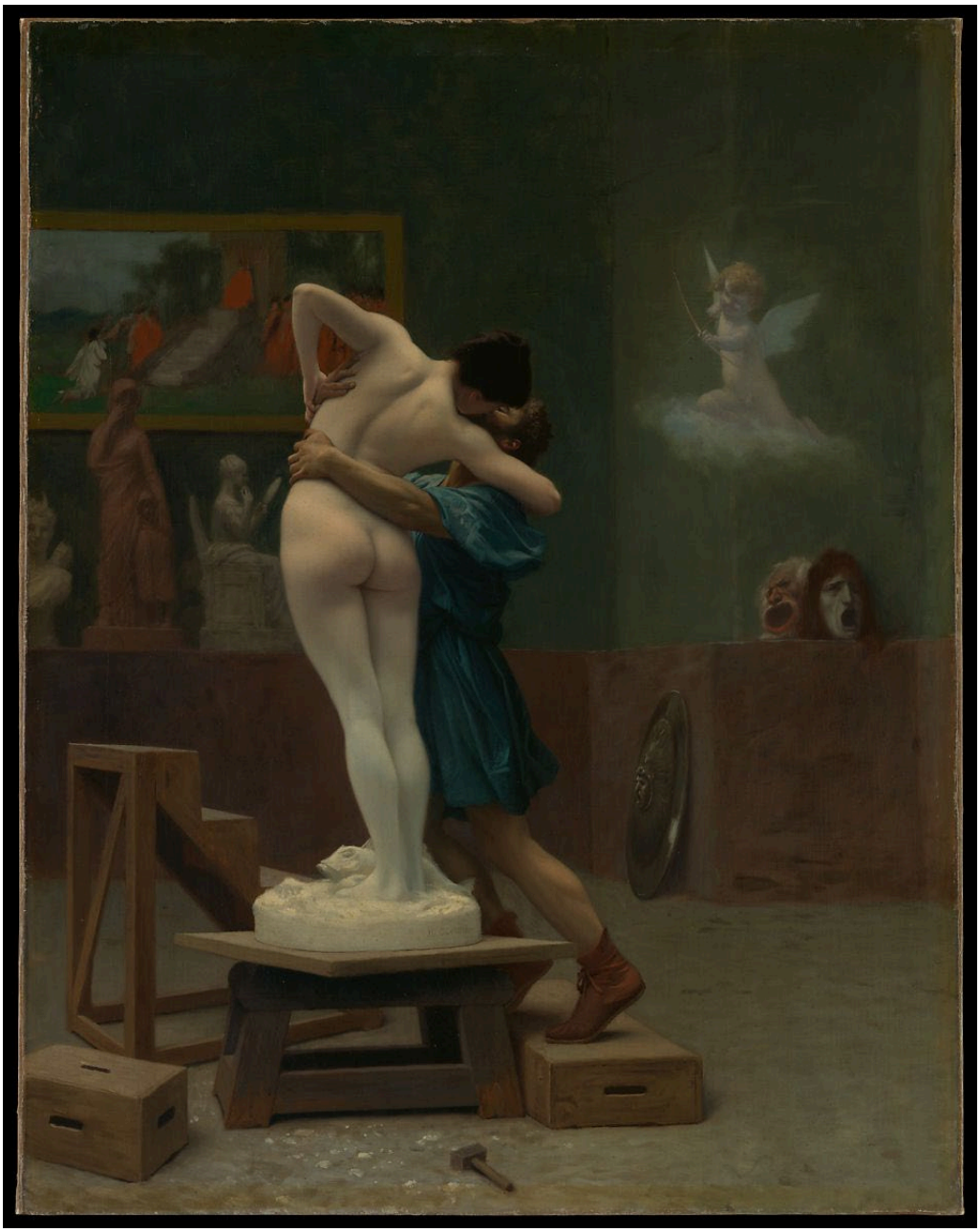

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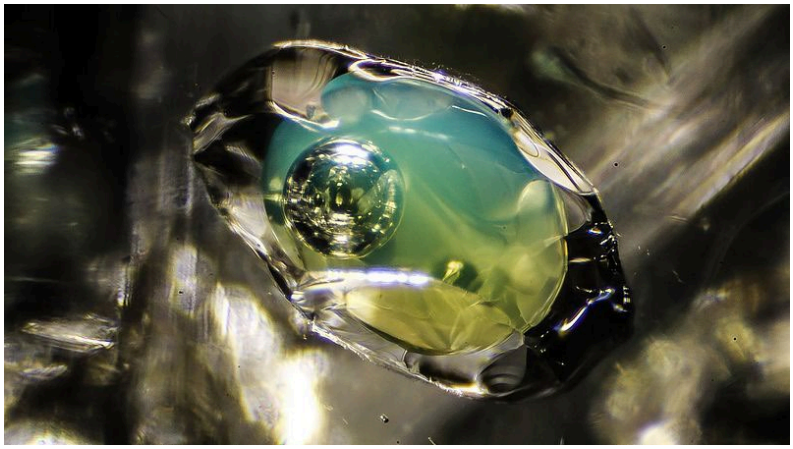

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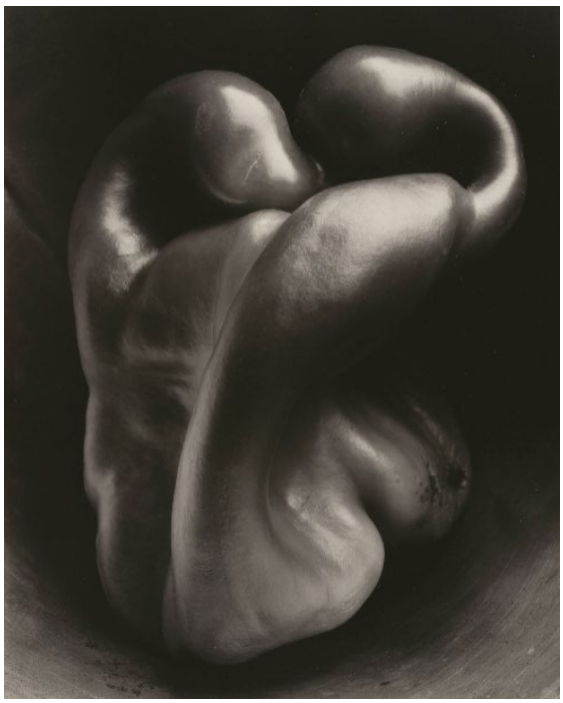

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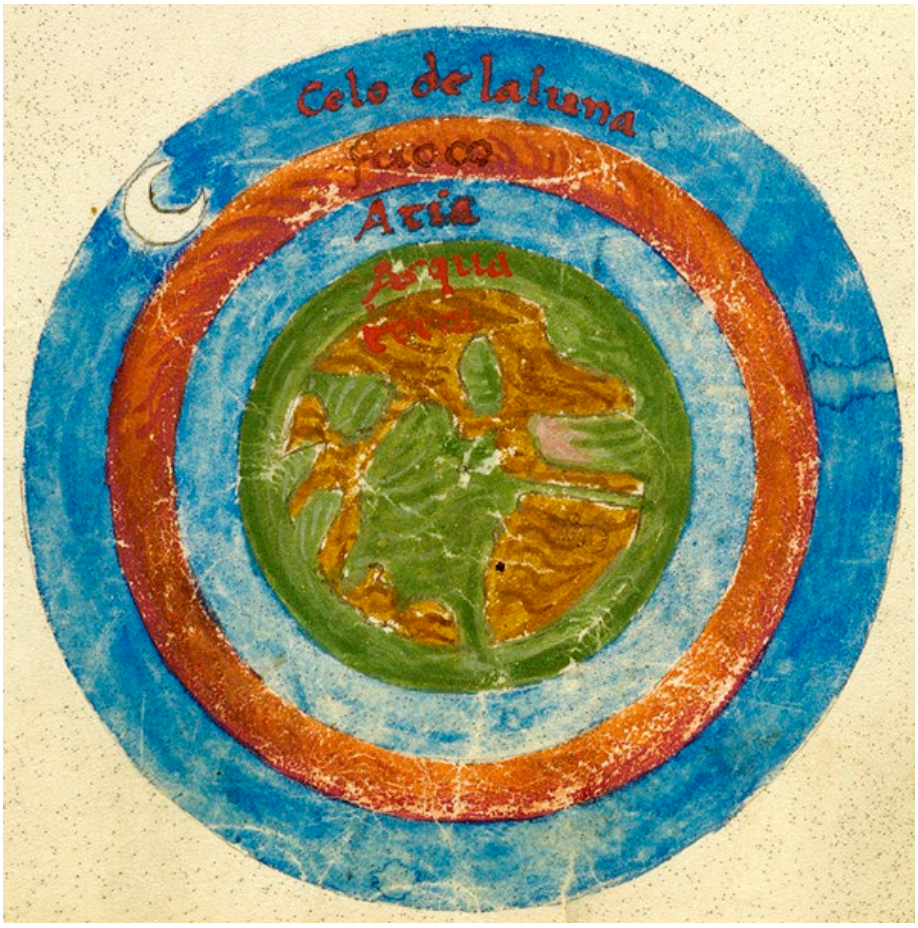

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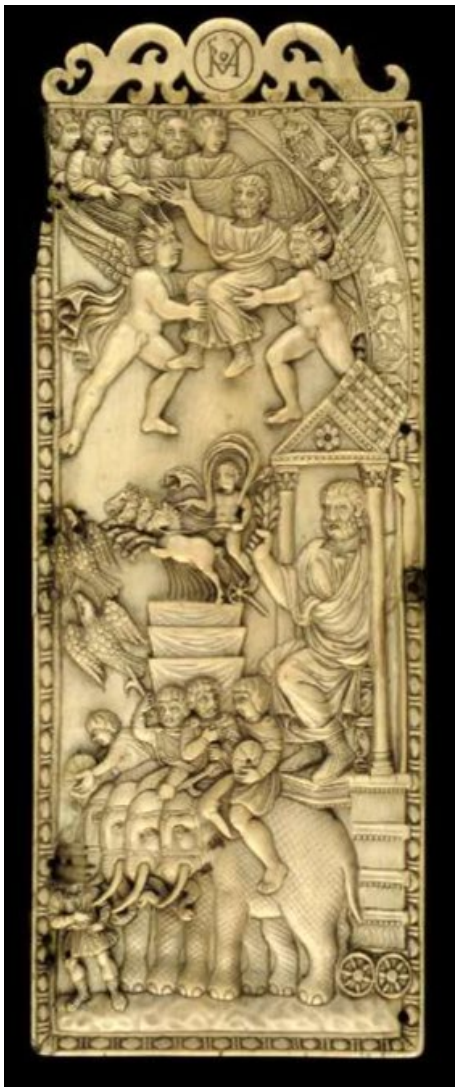

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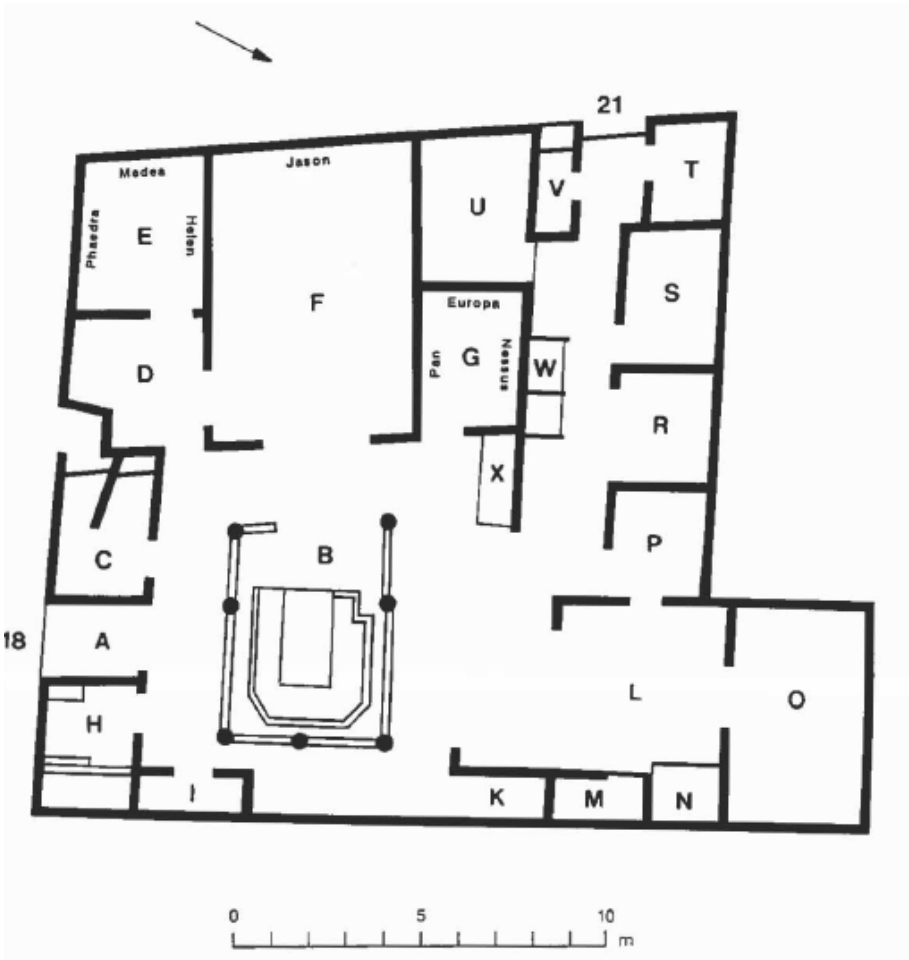

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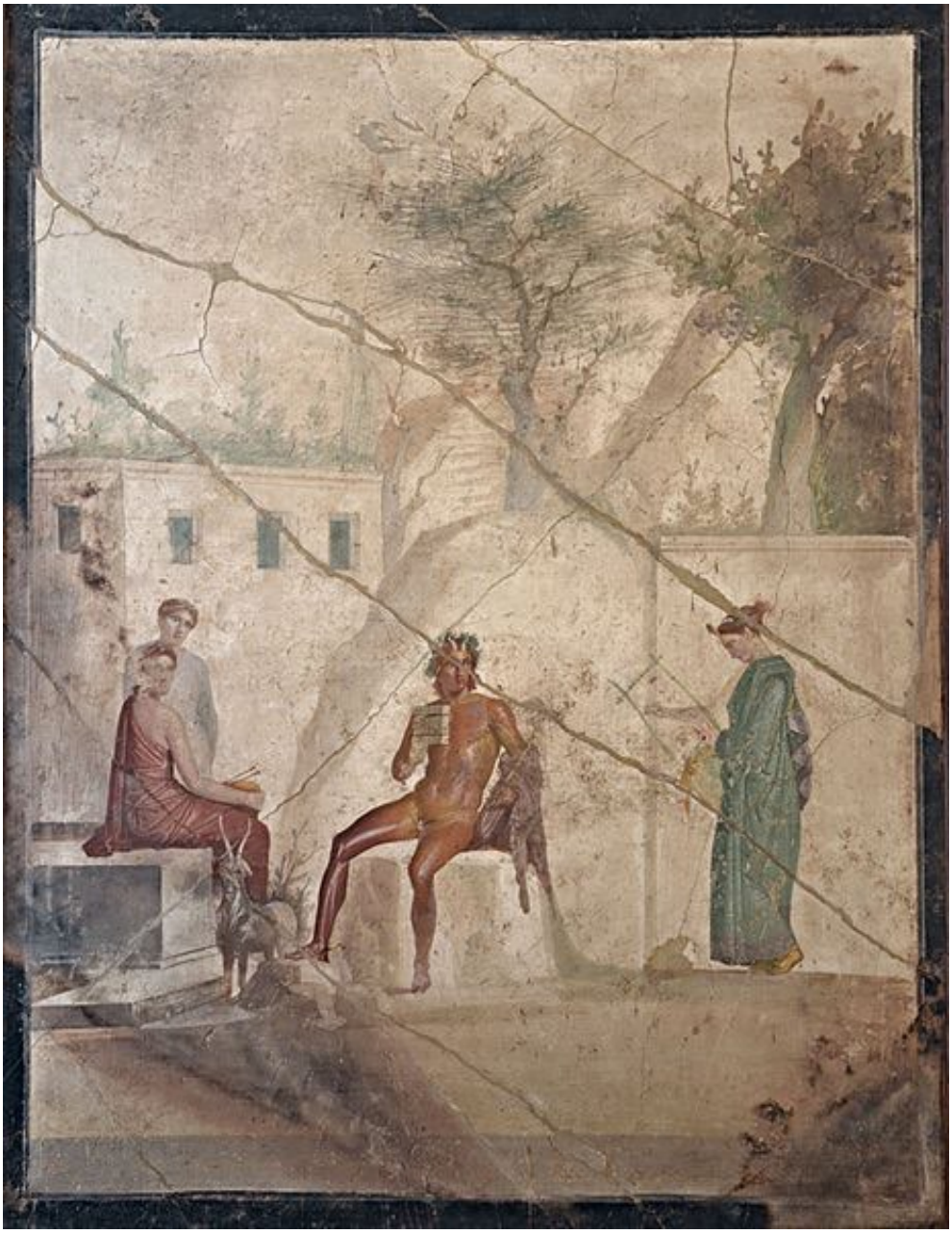

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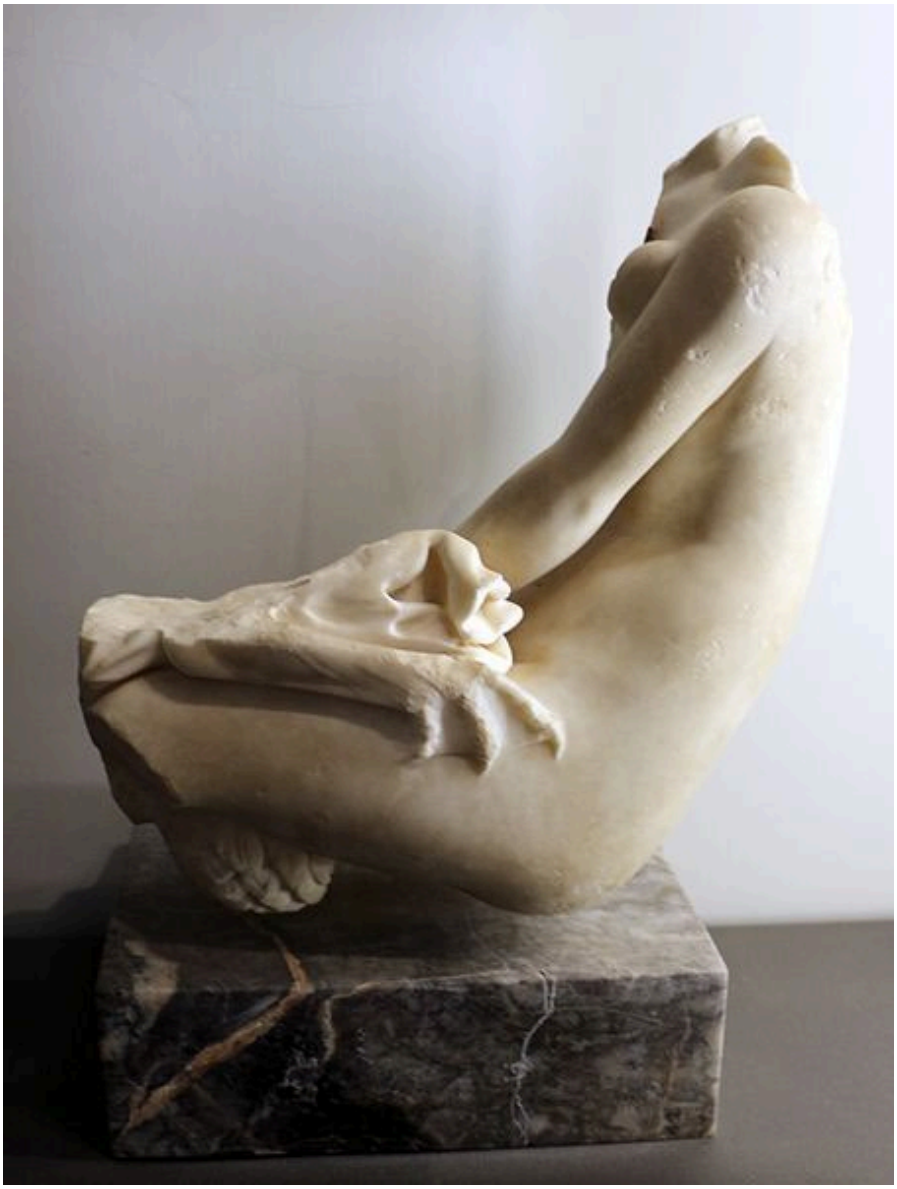

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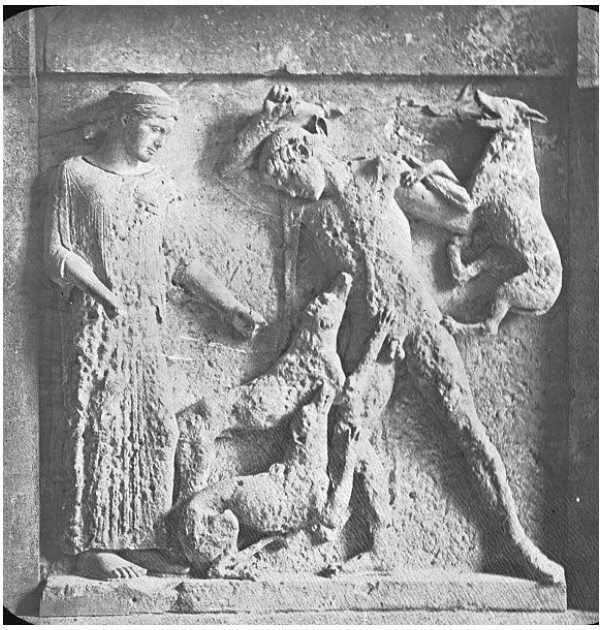

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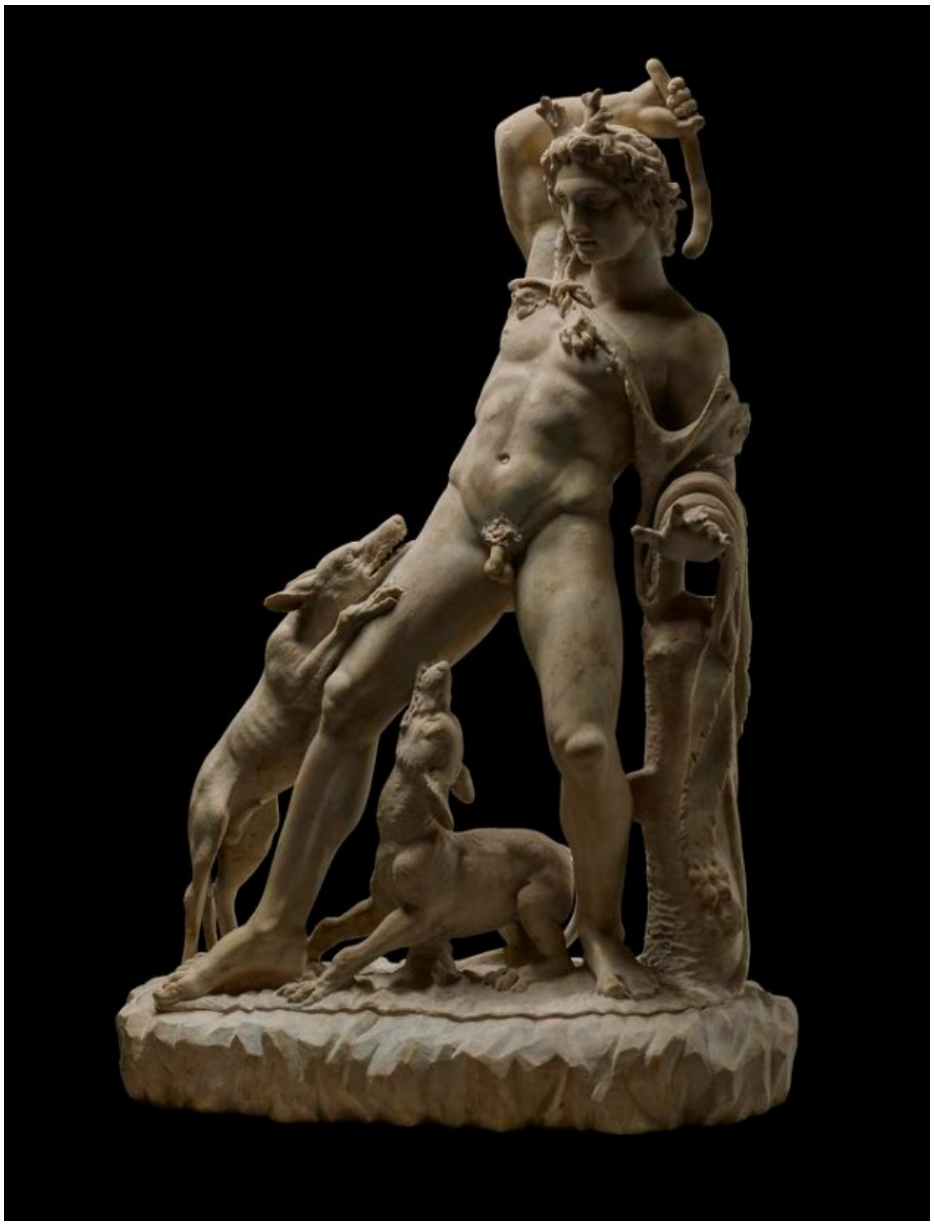

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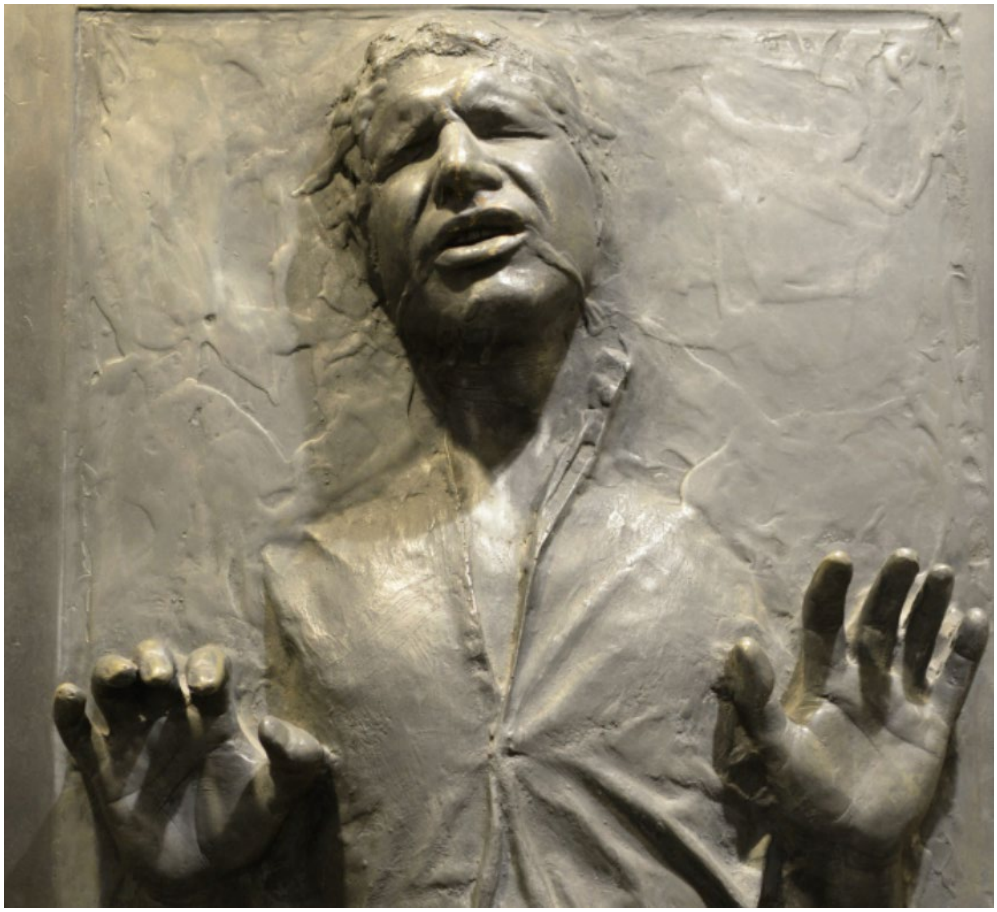

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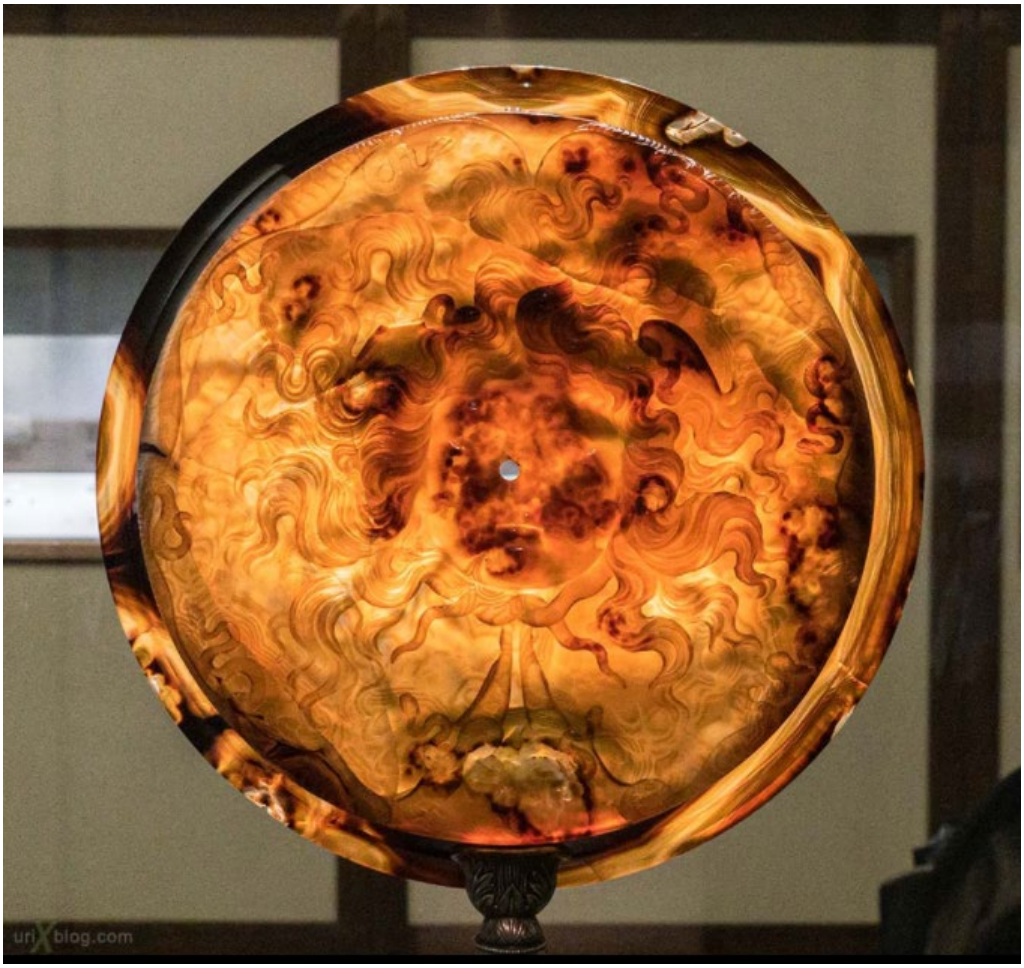

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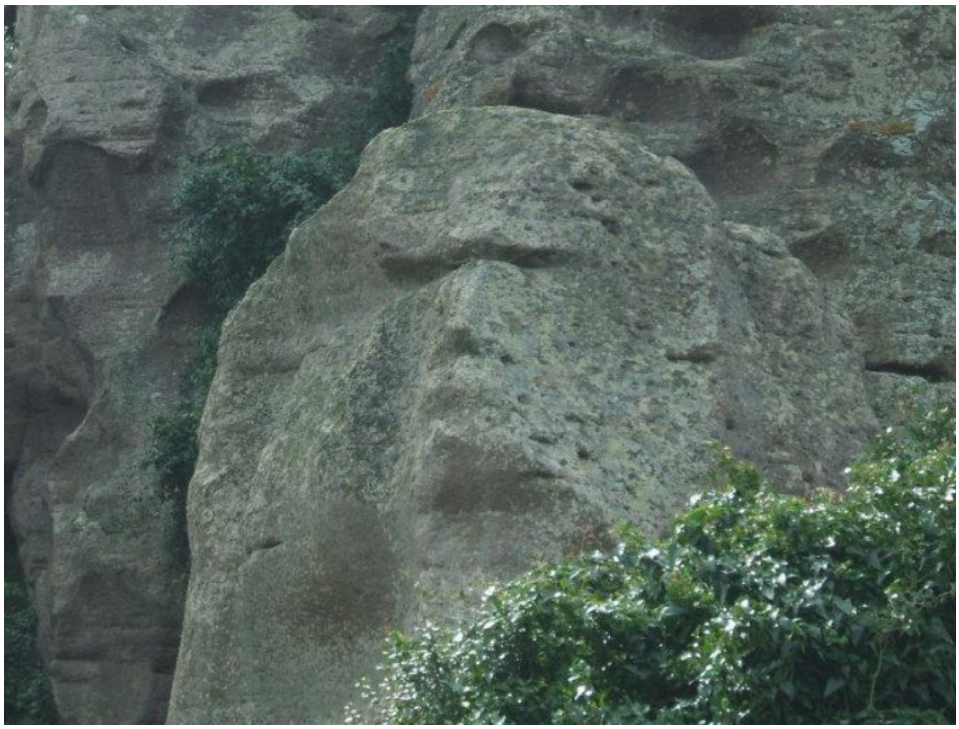

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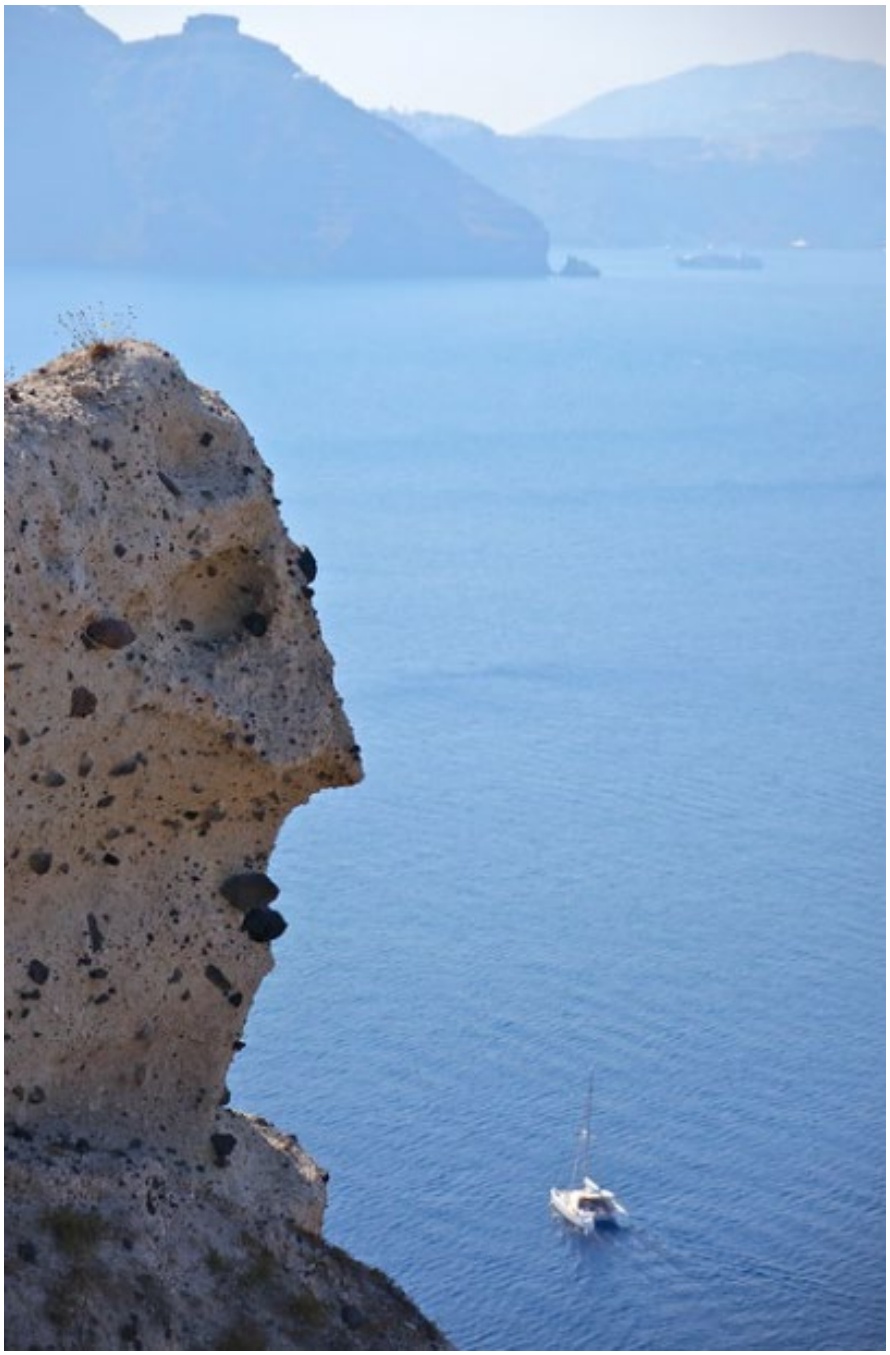

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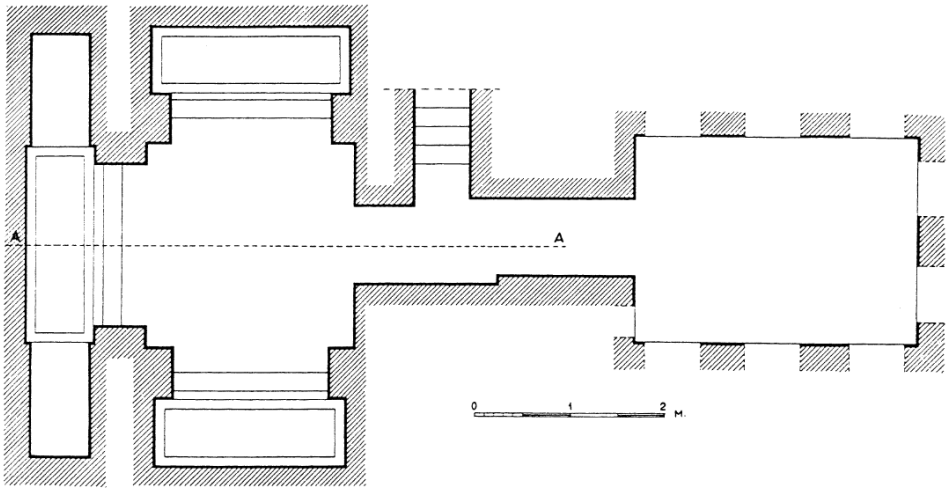

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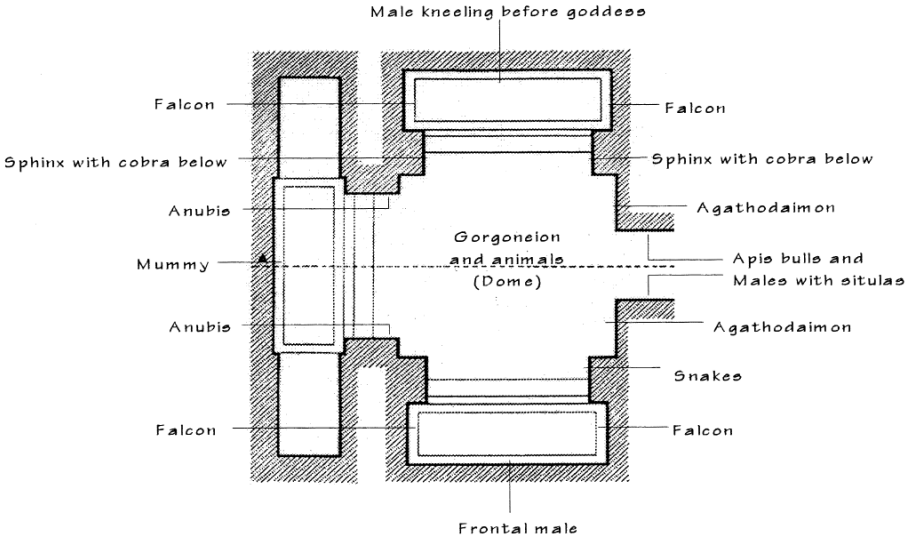

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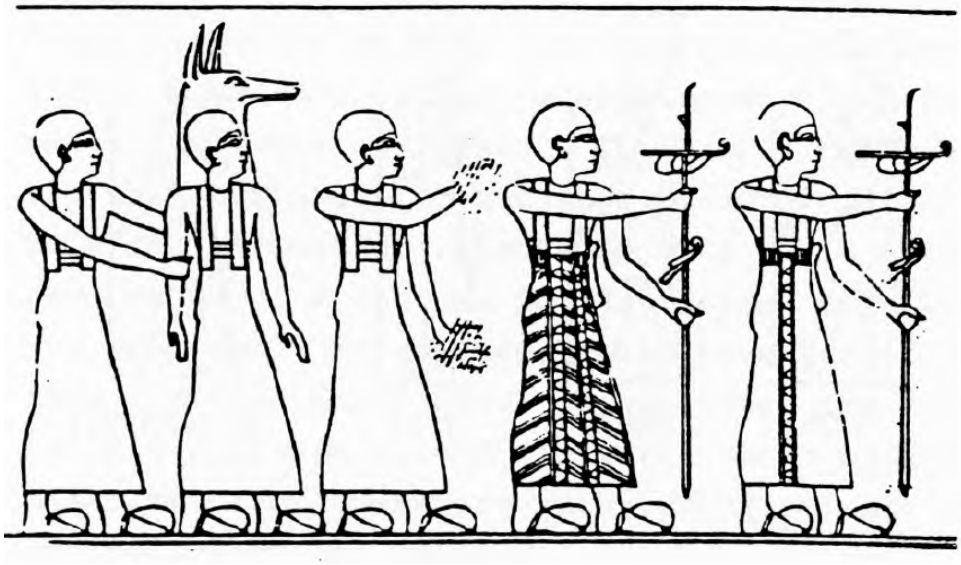

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Figure 4.12. Detail of 4.11.

Figure 4.13. Detail of 4.11.

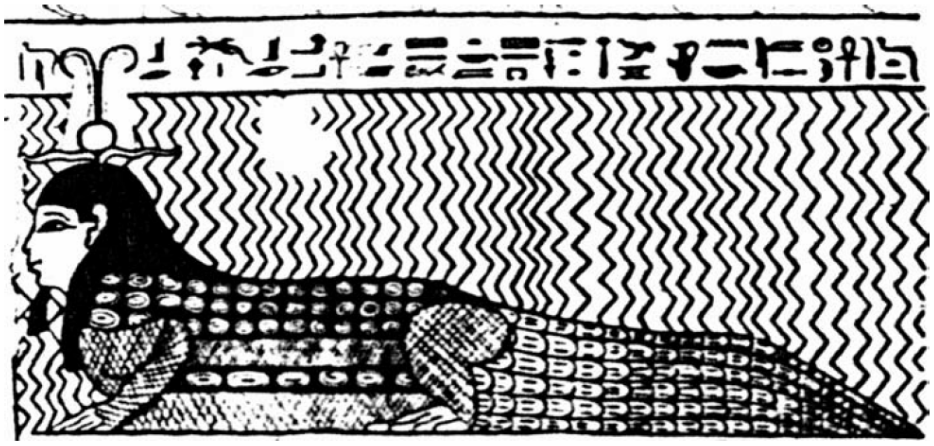

Figure 4.14. Detail from sarcophagus of Ankhruty, Hawara, Egypt, from W.M. Petrie, *Hawara, Biahmu and Arsinoe*, London 1889, pl. II.

Figure 4.15. Mask for a crocodile mummy, wood and gold leaf, Late Period–Ptolemaic Period (664-30 BCE), Egypt, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, inv. no. 12.182.33.

Figure 4.16. Elap Masquerade, Nyerenkpo Village, Nigeria, Photographed by Phyllis Galembo, 2004. From Galembo, “Maske,” p. 95.

Figure 4.17. Engraving by Charles Girardet depicting the interior of the so-called "crocodile pits" of Maabdeh ("Samoun"), Middle Egypt, from M.A. Georges' "Excursion aux grottes de Samoun ou des crocodiles" in Le Tour du Monde (1860), p. 172.